



Design

FOR

GRASSROOTS COMMUNITY

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A PROPOSAL FOR DESIGNING
CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

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DESIGN FOR GRASSROOTS COMMUNITY

A proposal for designing creative activities

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Abstract

The influence of globalization has rapidly spread across different levels of social development all over the world. For instance, current developments in art, culture and urban in Asia have been heavily influenced by economic demands. Urban development often takes place at the expense of art and culture. This work studies the creative environment in Hong Kong and the difficulties that the local artists and creators have in continuing their creative work there. The aim of this thesis is to propose a possible design solution to improve their creative environment.

This study is a design research inspired by a grassroots art project founded by the author and realized in collaboration with a group of amateur artists located both in Hong Kong and in Helsinki. This project led to the present thesis work, which also addresses a bottom-up movement that has influenced the transformation of the creative scene over the past twenty years.

This thesis takes a retroactive approach and uses constructive design research as a method to reactivate the collective experience and knowledge in the grassroots art project. In-depth interviews were conducted with the project co-creators, participants, and other project stakeholders with the aim of reaching the local creators directly in order to collect and understand their opinions. Analyzing the participants' reflections revealed problems that the project participants were concerned about and elements that they valued in their experience.

With this understanding, a possible design solution was sought to reconstruct the spontaneous art project into a constructive service idea for amateur artists. Service blueprinting and stakeholder map were then

used to illustrate the sustainability and flexibility of the design proposal. In the end, this insight was converted into a “four-layers” design framework, which aimed to provide guidance on establishing sustainability in other grassroots activities or existing bottom-up communities. In order to envision the future use of the proposal and the framework, the case study was then applied as an example of a way to improve the creative environment in Hong Kong.

Finally, the work reflects on and discusses the challenges in the research process as well the future difficulties that the local grassroots communities in Hong Kong will have to overcome in order to become a powerful support for the creative field and to achieve positive changes in a true bottom-up movement.

The key motivation for this thesis was my personal interest in art. Art has been my inspiration in aesthetic and creative activities long before I began my education in design. Studying design gave me another angle to realize art as a whole. Being a designer and an amateur artist myself, I always enjoyed different types of creative happenings. Ever since I began my MA study in industrial and strategy design at Aalto University, I came across various methodology and design tools and approaches such as user-centered research, constructive design, and service design. I believe these approaches to be useful when accommodating human considerations in forming better design objects or in framing design solutions.

Simultaneously, these lessons not only helped to guide my design work but also gave me many ideas and considerations for my artistic creation. In 2011, I began constructing a collaborative artwork idea that includes contents of identity discussion and cultural exchange. I co-founded a creative group named “Oranji is Oranji” and began designing and organizing a series of small collective art events in Helsinki and in my hometown Hong Kong. The project resulted in a collection of photography works that were produced together with over twenty amateur artists and young creators. Through designing this collective art project, I was able to integrate art-making as a medium to encounter different subjects and people. It allowed me to reflect on my own identity as an artist-designer and to discover local surroundings from Helsinki to Hong Kong.

At one point, the project may be seen as an individual art experiment. However, it also represents an entire design process for the creative event. Moreover, during my art experiment, I noticed that there were many questions and concerns related to the local creative environment in Hong Kong. Inspired by this, I decided to open up this topic and deepen my understanding through the rest of this research project.

The creative environment is a broad subject. It has multiple layers connected to consumerism, industry, art, culture, social development, and, possibly, politics. Based on my cultural background and limited time frame for this study, I chose Hong Kong as my research starting point. Through this thesis I sought answers to the following questions:

- (1) What are the essential environmental factors of the current creative community in Hong Kong?
- (2) What are the challenges that the bottom-up creative community faces and needs to overcome in order to sustain its community?

The collaborative art experience in *Oranji is Oranji* was utilized as a case study for this thesis work. Although part of the art-making process was conducted in Helsinki, I chose to focus on the part carried out in Hong Kong because of the complexity of the project and the study interests in this thesis. I localized the research user group as amateur artists, by which I refer to a group of people actively consuming and requiring creative services and products at a grassroots level but has been underrepresented within the creative community. By studying the *Oranji project*, I also sought to understand:

- (3) What were the values that the art experience produced for the amateur artists who participated in the project?
- (4) What are possible design solutions for improving and sustaining grassroots creative activities in Hong Kong?

The term “grassroots” and “bottom-up” are used interchangeably in this thesis. The term “bottom-up movement” in this thesis refers to spontaneous activities formed by a local community. Individuals in a bottom-up community may not have professional backgrounds related to the contents, issues, or types of activities in the community.

CONSTRUCTIVE DESIGN RESEARCH

Constructive Design Research is the framework that I applied in processing this research project. “The term refers to design research in which construction - be it product, system, space or media - takes center place and becomes the key means in constructing knowledge. Typically, this ‘thing’ in the middle is a prototype. However, it can be also a scenario, a mock-up, or just a detailed concept that could be constructed.” (Koskinen et al., 2011: 5-6)

As Koskinen states, it is clear that constructive design research requires a “thing” for design and knowledge to build upon. In this thesis I centered the case study as the foundation of the design proposal that I constructed along with my research study. As the research dealt with the real-world context of the creative environment in Hong Kong, the case study follows the *Field research* approach mentioned as one of the three constructive design research methods in the book “Design Research through Practice”.

According to Koskinen et al. (2011: 81), the *Field research* approach has its roots in industry, where it primarily informs design. It has provided a solution to an important problem, that of understanding and exploring social context. It is useful to know how people make sense of what they see and hear and how they choose to do what they do. While exploring the research context, field researchers prefer going after the subject matter in natural settings where some parts of the design have been used. They believe that to study humans and their use of design, they need to understand their systems of meanings. (Koskinen et al., 2011: 69)

Following the concept of *Fieldwork*, a design researcher introduces his/her design imaginations into the lives of people in order to follow how these imaginations shape the studied individuals’ activities, thoughts, and beliefs. (Koskinen et al., 2011: 79) There are also design researchers who stress the value of merely diving into society in order to gain an understanding of people for design. The design process is increasingly opened up to people, whether these are stakeholders or users, and designers and researchers work as facilitators rather than as detached observers. Designers’ interest has also been shifting from individuals and systems to groups and communities in recent years. Some of them have turned to action research, where the goal is to use knowledge gained by studying a group or community in order to change it, whether this is improving service systems and concepts or studying how service design may be used to dematerialize society in order to make it more ecologically and socially sustainable. (Koskinen et al., 2011: 82-83)

Moreover, first-hand experience of context is considered very important in fieldwork and is prioritized over fact-finding and theoretically-informed interpretation. (Koskinen et al., 2011: 69-84) In my case study, the imaginations translated into a series of collaborative art events. The art experience produced in these art events was set as a social object and provided proper conditions for understanding the target group. By revisiting this experience with the project participants, I was also able to create in-depth dialogue with them that helped to rediscover the value from the *fieldwork* prototype. As I have explained previously, this research project aimed to provide ideas of sustainable changes for creative communities.

RETROACTIVE APPROACH

My research approach in this thesis was a retroactive one. This approach was inspired by a practice-led research method proposed by Maarit Mäkelä (2006). The suggested framework is a reducible hermeneutic circle that consists of artifacts and a retroactive approach to those works. A narrative of the creative process was used as a starting point and was followed with a reflection based on the structure of the related artistic practice. The retrospective viewpoint reflects the researcher's observations and interpretation, but should also indicate influential research literature from the chosen field of studies. Moreover, the self-reflective part of the approach also addresses a research trend called "autoethnography", in which personal experience of the researcher is given more importance as part of the research. (Mäkelä, 2006: 75-77)

In Mäkelä's case, she involved a total three exhibitions in her doctoral research, each exhibition introduced and reviewed with a chapter of theoretical texts based on her own working process and learning from women's' studies. Through this research approach, Mäkelä built a bridge between art and research by following both her roles as a female ceramic artist and a feminist researcher. In addition, her study also highlights the spiral form of retroactive framework which provides repeated visitation to the subject matter of the research study, so that understanding and knowledge can be accumulated and deepened. (Mäkelä, 2006: 82)

I applied the retrospective approach to review my art experience. I was able to integrate my role as a practitioner in the art experiment and as the designer of the project. The approach provided me with a chance to

combine my art experience with constructing a design proposal.

I divided the case study into two parts – the Art-making Stage and the Exhibition Stage. Both stages proceeded from observation to in-depth interviews with my project participants and visitors. In this manner, my research cycle made it possible to revisit the subject matter in the accumulated learning spiral of the retroactive research method. (figure 1)

The retroactive research approach emphasizes the importance of the creator's personal experience. Yet, the artistic practice in my case study was a collective art experiment that involved over twenty project participants. As Jokela (2008: 233) stated, "The artistic process encourages more sensitive and accurate observation, and can also be used to evoke personal and collective memories and inspire discussion." He also recommends that the researcher should collect two kinds of reflective research data for phenomenological analysis, which includes data concerning the activity itself and data concerning the artistic experience related to it. These data also provide another perspective for the researcher to understand what may trigger changes in thinking in the people involved according to their collective art experience. (Jokela, 2008: 232)

Therefore, I consider the experiences of my project partner, project participants, and visitors as relevant as my own voice. Moreover, for the purposes of this research, this collected data also helped to avoid biased interpretation.

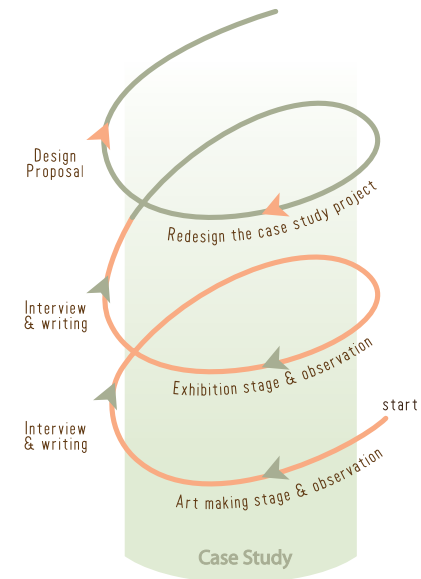


figure 1 : Constructive design framework with retroactive approach

RESEARCH PROCESS

The following figure (figure 2) lays out the process of this research.

Stage 1: Background

The background stage was the collection of second-hand research. It aimed to understand the environmental factors that have influenced the current creative scene in Hong Kong. It also addressed the bottom-up phenomena that had happened in the local grassroots communities. The study consists of a preliminary understanding of the cultural and social background in Hong Kong. It also included five bottom-up creative communities related to the development of the local creative environment.

Stage 2: Case study – Art-making stage

The art experiment project created by *Oranji is Oranji* was used as the first-hand research material and the main case study in this thesis work. *Field research* following the constructive design research approach was used as the method in this part of the study. This research stage aimed to reach the target research group and to collect reflections and opinions on their creative experience in the *Oranji project* and thus further understand problems and needs in their creative process. As the experiment project was done prior to this research, the research went through a retroactive process in order to reactivate the prior project experience. The case study concluded with a comparison analysis from my reflective observation as project creator, incorporating thirteen individual in-depth interviews with seven male and six female project participants in the *Oranji project*.

Stage 3: Case study - Exhibition stage

Following the previous stage, the exhibition stage was a follow-up experiment that aimed to enrich communication through creative work from the *Oranji project*. The study focused on understanding the design application of the visiting experience in the *Oranji exhibition*. With the same research approach used in the previous art-making stage, the research again went through a retroactive process that included my on-site observation and experience as the project creator and twenty visitor interviews that were conducted for analyzing the results of the exhibition design. The twenty visitors included the thirteen project participants from the previous stage and an additional seven female visitors who did not participate in the art-making process.

Stage 4: Design Proposal

After the research stage, I transferred the insight into a constructive service idea for amateur artists based on the *Oranji project*. *Service blueprinting* and *stakeholder map* were used to illustrate the characteristics, sustainability, and flexibility of the design proposal. The proposal was then converted into a “four-layers” design framework that aimed to provide guidance on establishing sustainability in future development of *Oranji is Oranji* activities as well as in other grassroots activities or bottom-up communities. In the end, I also explored my future vision on the design framework by applying it to the context of the creative environment in Hong Kong.

	Stage 1 Background	Stage 2 Art Making Project	Stage 3 Exhibition	Stage 4 Design Proposal
Research Question	<p>What are the essential environmental factors of current creative community in Hong Kong?</p> <p>What are the challenges that the bottom up creative community are facing and have to overcome in order to sustain its community?</p>	<p>How did <i>Oranji is Oranji</i> create a grassroots creative activity?</p> <p>What are the values that the art experience produced to the amateur artists who had participated in the project?</p>	<p>How to enrich the communication by designing the <i>Oranji</i> exhibition?</p> <p>What are the values that the visitors received from their visiting experience?</p>	<p>How to improve <i>Oranji Project</i>?</p> <p>What are the possible design solutions for improving and sustaining grassroots creative activities in Hong Kong?</p>
Methods	<p>Second-hand background research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cultural and social background - Development of local creative community 	<p>First-hand research</p> <p>Constructive design research (Field Research)</p> <p>Retroactive research approach</p> <p>Case study: <i>Oranji</i> photo project</p> <p>Revisit and reflect to the project experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reflection from Project creators - In-depth interview with project participants 	<p>First-hand research</p> <p>Constructive design research (Field Research)</p> <p>Retroactive research approach</p> <p>Case study: <i>Oranji</i> exhibition</p> <p>Revisit and reflect to the visiting experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reflection from Project creators - In-depth interview with visitors 	<p>Service Blue Print</p> <p>Stakeholders map</p>

figure 2 : Research process

CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT
IN HONG KONG

Hong Kong is one of the busiest metropolis Asian cities in the world. The development of the society was, and still is, highly focused on industry contribution to economic growth and employment. This functional, yet narrow, value comes from the historical background of colonial governance. The general cognition of the local creative environment also seems to follow the same path.

Before the 1980s, cultural development in Hong Kong was led by the colonial government, which mainly focused on importing Western fine art and was labeled as high-end leisure activities. Also, based on political considerations, there were no practical policies that focused on developing local culture. The government neither tried to suppress it nor encourage its happening. In the 1990s, along with the transfer of sovereignty, the colonial government began raising awareness on social stability. Therefore, they started to increase investment in social welfare and capital construction, especially on facilities for exhibition and large-scale performances. They tried to advocate more ordinary cultural activities for Hong Kong citizens in order to avoid any agitated sentiments and to build an impression of prosperity. However, although options in art and cultural activities widened, the top-down approach to handling the development of art and culture still remained unchanged. (Ku and Tsui, 2009: 79-99)

According to Ku and Tsui (2009), after the hand-over in 1997, there four new discussions on cultural development began to appear in the society, including: (1) globalization; (2) cultural economy; (3) cultural de-

mocracy; and (4) community culture. The first two discussions came from strategy viewpoints that the Hong Kong SAR government put forth in a Policy Address in 1999. There were descriptions about the idea to promote Hong Kong as an international city and to highlight the economic value that could be generated from tourism and creative industry. However, for cultural development, the government has yet to come up with a comprehensive policy for its long-term growth. Besides pushing the consideration on economic concern, the government also carries on with the same top-down strategy on social development and urban reconstruction. Therefore, within the last eighteen years, deteriorating neighborhoods have been disappearing from the local community and replaced with commercial buildings and shopping malls. Thus, the local culture, history, and community network that are connected with the neighborhood also become eradicated.

This post-colonial phenomenon triggered Hong Kong citizens to be aware of their own social environment. This explains the reasons for the other two concerns raising discussion: cultural democracy and community culture. More and more people, including local citizens, social workers, designers, architects, community artists, educators, and district council, were involved in the discussion and they soon became a social movement that stands for the voice from the local community. Thereby, the concept of nativism also became majorly expanded afterwards.

THE CREATIVITY INDEX

Following the events described above, there was a study on creativity index which was commissioned by the Hong Kong SAR government and accomplished in 2005 by The University of Hong Kong Centre for Cultural Policy Research. The study focused on researching a framework for measuring creativity in order to provide data references for the government to understand the current state of the creative sector and to improve overall decision-making and policy implementation for sustainable growth of the Hong Kong economy. According to the study report (Centre for Cultural Policy Research. The University of Hong Kong, 2005: 40), the framework included a set of five criteria named 5Cs (figure 3) which included: (1) outcomes of creativity; (2) structural/institutional capital; (3) human capital; (4) social capital; (5) cultural capital.

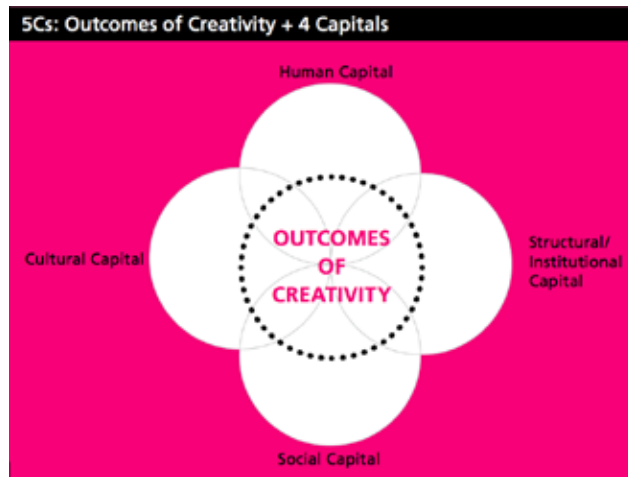


figure 3: Hong Kong Creativity Index 5Cs framework
Source: Centre for Cultural Policy Research from The University of Hong Kong, 2005)

The study provides a collection of data from 1999 to 2004 and shows a positive and steady growth pattern on the overall *Creativity Index*. However, the report also states that some parts of the data are incomplete and lack in historical support. For instance, in *Social Capital Index*, which should show important reflection on general trust and attitudes of the society, mainly presents indicators from the corporate and individual donations as well as public investment in developing social capital in Hong Kong. There are 18 out of 21 listed numbers from “norms and values” and “social participation” only contains data from 2004.

The *Cultural Capital Index*, “attitude towards arts, cultural and creative activities” and “environmental factors for cultural and creative activities” is also incomplete in data. The numbers are more focus on household consumption of cultural goods such as computers, electronic devices, and communication services. Furthermore, the *Structural/Institutional Capital Index* shows that a conducive milieu in favor of creative activities has been weakened due to the declining pattern on the independence of the legal system and freedom of expression in Hong Kong. Thus, the validity of entrepreneurship and the growth in community facilities also remain stagnant. Yet, the *Human Capital Index* has the most positive and supportive growth pattern based on different segments such as the development of the business sector, higher education, and public institutions.

As a result, the *Outcome of Creativity Index* from this study seems not to represent a full picture of the creative sector of Hong Kong. To my understanding, the report did not contain particular study on the strategic analysis or suggestion. Even though it leaves a positive impression on Human Capital and its related resources, it also implies a demand on the environmental and humanities concern which was lacking from the study. Hence, after this report there are no updated data that are currently available to reflect the most recent changes and development base on the suggested *creativity index*.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE LOCAL CREATIVE COMMUNITY

Nevertheless, I have noticed the time frame of the creative index study data in fact meet around the same time that the local creative community has been significantly taking shape in Hong Kong. And by observing the environmental development of the local creative community from the recent decade, it seems to fill in the vacancy of information and to provide an updated perspective to review the transformation of the local creative community in Hong Kong.

ARTIST VILLAGE

The Oil Street

The first artist village began in 1998 at Oil Street, Hong Kong Island. The place was originally the headquarters of the Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club in 1908. After the Yacht Club moved out in 1946, the locale reverted back to the government as a warehouse of the Government Logistics Department (GLD). Seeking to capitalize on the commercial value of the area, the government moved the GLD warehouse and planned to resell the land. However, because of the financial tsunami, the land-selling program was not as successful as expected and the government decided to rent out the location at a lower price, and finally signing a short-term contract with a local art association. (“從油街至牛棚 生生死死的噩夢”, 2012)

Taking advantage of the excellent location, cheap rent and beautiful seaside area, the site soon attracted over thirty artists and creative groups to move in, so that gradually an intimate small creative community was formed. According to an artist interview found in local media mingpao weekly (“從油街至牛棚 生生死死的噩夢”, 2012), the artists said that they really appreciated the freedom and the approachable environment when thinking back in time. There seemed to be no limitation to how they approached creative work, so that they could paint walls and gather for music performances and exhibitions - there was even an exhibition that took place on the sea. The village was always open to the public, so that anyone who was interested in an event was welcome to visit. The artists' activities and events were always spontaneous and localized. The artists and local people developed good interaction and supportive relationships. Within a short period of time, the artist village became popular around the Asian creative industry. One of the artists expressed in the interview that the years she spent on

Oil street can be considered as the greatest moments she has ever experienced on the local creative scene.

However, a year later, in 1999, the government announced that they had decided to take over the place again and the village was forced to shut down. There was a huge debate between local creative community and the government. The argument continued for many years and government still refused to give up their intention of putting the land in commercial use. Yet, the location remained as an empty space for thirteen years, until April 2013 when the site reopened as “Oi! art space” under the Hong Kong Visual Arts Centre. (“鬧市中的喘息 - 油街實現藝術區”, 2013)

The Cattle Depot Artist Village

To comfort the creative community, the government provided another location for the community in Ma Tau Kok, Kowloon, later also known as Cattle Depot Artist Village, starting around 2000 - 2001. The place was originally a slaughterhouse in the early 1990s. Though the site is still somewhat near the sea, the location is far from the city center with no direct transportation. Yet, it became the temporary home for around twenty artists and creative groups; most of them are from the former creative community from the Oil Street Artist Village. However, the Government Property Agency (GAP) responsible for the site management also gave the community a very uneasy time with restraints such as:

(1) Constraint of space

The site has been listed as a Grade II historical site; there are a lot of regulations placed on the resident artists. According to the same artist interview from Mingpao weekly (“從油街至牛棚 生生死死的噩夢”, 2012), artists are not allowed to paint walls, take photos, or stay overnight in their own studios. Corridors are

marked as public space, and it is therefore prohibited to put plants or artists' own work outside their studios and even rehearsals cannot be conducted in those spaces.

(2) Short-term contract

Although the site offers relatively low rent for the studios, after 2004 the GAP changed their policy and only offered short-term contracts to resident artists. The artists have to renew their contracts every three months, which causes a lot of problems for long-term creative planning, as it is not possible for the artists to write proposals when they are not sure whether they have a stable venue to work, not to mention apply for funding.

(3) Not open to public

The GAP admits that they treat Cattle depot as an historical site and governmental property but never an artist village. For example, if the artists want to hold an exhibition, they need to apply for a Temporary Place of Public Entertainment License. Moreover, there is also a stringent rule of checking visitors' IDs before they could enter when public events are held. Otherwise, the place is not open to the public on day-to-day basis. (Chan, 2006)

Compared to the situation in the artist village, around the same period of time in 2000, with the migration of industries to Mainland China, some local artists and creative units also started moving to several old industrial areas in Hong Kong such as Kwun Tong, Fotan, and Chai Wan. They took the advantage of large empty factory spaces from old industrial buildings and started setting up their studios there. As this area grows popular, a new community takes shape.

The area was first rented by a couple of fine art students from the nearby Chinese University of Hong Kong. Since 2001, the creative community around this area has curated an annual event called “Fotanian Open Studio”. The artists usually open their workspaces and invite the public to come and visit for three weekends (in total six days) at the beginning of every year. It is an event whose intent is to communicate and interact with the general public and anyone who may be interested in the artists’ works. There are already 88 studios and 250 artists who have been involved, and the event has been running for over ten years. (Lam, 2007)

JCCAC (The Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre)

Several years after the spontaneous movement from the local creative community, the government seemed to follow the example of Fotan and establish a new cooperation between the Hong Kong Arts Development Council, the Hong Kong Arts Centre, and the Hong Kong Baptist University beginning in 2005. They founded a new self-financed artist village named JCCAC (The Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre) from a renovated industrial building located in Shek Kip Mei. The place is also known as an industrial area since the 1970s. JCCAC was opened in 2008 and around 140 individual artists and creative groups are able to rent studio space with at a low budget for the first one to two years in their careers. The place also offers venues for exhibition and performance. Once in a while, the center holds a public event like a craft fair, a workshop, or a short-term learning program. (Hong Kong Creative Arts Centre, 2005)

CREATIVE COMMUNITIES IN OLD URBAN DISTRICT

As mentioned before, nativism has been blossoming around the local community. This phenomenon shows in the increasing numbers of grassroots communities. Some of them have physical venues that are located in the old urban areas, such as Hong Kong House of Story and Wan Chai Visual Archive in Wai Chai, Woofer Ten in Yau Ma Tei, To Home in To Kwa Wan... etc. There are also many local communities that do not have stable venues which are also cooperating in local community work. These communities mainly focus on cultural preservation, they highlight the human power of local communities and emphasize the role of the involved participants. Community artists, designers, and educators are taking a role in emerging art and cultural activities with a purpose of preserving the local cultural heritage. They apply art and creative works as a medium to increase social engagement as well as regain the means and values from everyday life.

Community Museum Project

An early example can be found in CMP - a Hong Kong-based curatorial collective founded in 2002. The members of the collective consist of a design educator, an art curator, and a cultural researcher. Most of the project in CMP aims to raise the awareness of fading local culture and history in Hong Kong.

Since 2005, the collective have developed a series of living museums named "Street As Museum". They believe that the best museum is on the street, a place where real local people can tell stories about their lives. In each event, the collective partners with a different social corporate, art organization, and local community living in the old urban district. The events highlight the value of personal experience and emphasizes the empowerment of participants.

According to Siu (2013: 69), the core strategy in CMP is "cultural scavenging". It is a strategy that employs methodologies in art and design to collect, interpret, visualize, and showcase social issues. It also uses "museum" as a method to engage "museologically" in the articulation of everyday experience, as artifacts and exhibits can help to imagine or even enact certain characteristics and practices of a community.

This strategy was realized in the Photo-stocktaking project at Lee Tung Street. Lee Tung Street is nicknamed "Wedding Card Street", where one of the oldest traditional printing industries is located. Because of its large-scale removal and re-development by the Urban Renewal Authority, it has become one of the highly debated topics in the society. CMP wanted to scavenge the culture and history from Lee Tung Street before

it is fully destroyed. They began their collecting work with student researchers and photographers. However, instead of taking ordinary documentary photos, the collective tried to capture Lee Tung Street with a more impartial approach. One of the results of the project was a pair of panoramic images compiled from 400 photos that display the facades of the building along the entire streetscape. Besides the visual collection, they also collected stories by interviewing shop owners and local residents. They then incorporated these materials into a visual diagram to understand and record the social relationships within the neighborhood. The project was finally displayed as an exhibition and also became a platform for further discussion on the urban renewal.

THE BOTTOM-UP MOVEMENT

We may understand from the above examples that the government and the local community are strongly opposed when it comes to the understanding of local art and culture. Besides the one-sided economic social strategy, the Hong Kong government has always viewed and applied policy from a top-down position. Conversely, local communities try to express their concerns and resentful opinions in their bottom-up movement. Since the urban renewal project, community arts and related organizations have begun to blossom in recent years. This phenomenon provides evidence that art and culture have already been embedded in our everyday life; it is symbiosis with and as part of the local community.

The local creative community appears to be in a similar situation. Learning from the study of creative index, the report shows that there are existing physical resources available in Social Capital, while Human Capital is also growing positively. However, that does not prove that the creative environment is healthy for its long-term growth. The effects of the shutdown of Oil Street and the limitations given in the case of the Cattle Depot artist village have been to directly discourage the local creators from continuing their creative work. The government is obviously not responding to the needs of the creative community. Rather, it restrains the promotion of a healthy atmosphere in the general creative environment.

In response to this challenging situation, the creative community, who are now gathered in those renewal buildings, are actually compelled to recreate their own creative space there. As Lien (1993) a professor of Na-

tional Taipei University of Education School of Art, point out in his article “Alternative space, Alternative to What?” that these renewal spaces also known as “Alternative space”, a concept adopted from the 70s in New York avant garde art scene. Alternative spaces in Asia mainly focus on “creating space” for “people”. The notion behind these spaces are aim to support the ongoing meeting and discussion from artists, artworks and their audience. These alternative spaces are usually organized by the artists or creative groups themselves, and because of its spontaneous background, the nature of these community are highly self-organized and are very much community oriented. These spaces also seen as one of the solution for creative community to survive and they are very popular around major Asian countries in the past 20 years. (Yao, 2011: 12-13) These types of spaces seem to provide freedom and new opportunities for artists and creators to continue their creative works. Yet, most of the locations of renewal or Alternative space are usually outside the city centers or in suburban areas. They are gradually pushed away from the core urban areas where the mainstream social and economic activities are thus not affected.

Even though there are fundamental differences between community art and traditional art, their development, however, is still interlocking with each other. These bottom-up communities seem to bring a positive effect on raising awareness of the related social issues, as well as establish a more welcoming relationship and environment for both local and creative communities.

However, one of the biggest challenges of bottom up approaches is the ability to become sustainable. Some of the communities start to lose their strength due to lack of physical support, while some of them have not

continued because a certain social issue or discussion comes to an end. For example, Woofer Ten, one of the most active urban creative community, have lost their support from the Hong Kong Arts Development Council in the beginning of 2014 and are now facing the possibility of losing their physical venue which has been built together with the local residents in Yau Ma Tei in the past five years. Not many of the grassroots communities that are now running have been well recorded, structured, or discussed in academic context like the example in CMP. Their valuable experiences in building communities, activities, as well as networks and relationships with citizens are all hard to accumulate or inherit. Yet, it is clear that the local creative communities still attempt to utilize the bottom-up movement to pursue their creative careers.

*Case study:
Art making stage*

INTRODUCTION OF THE PROJECT

The case study that I chose to present in this thesis was a spontaneous art experiment established by a Helsinki and Hong Kong-based art project team named *Oranji is Oranji*. The team was co-founded in late 2010 by myself and Tiffany Chan who is a graphic designer and illustration artist in Hong Kong. The team has been focusing on contemporary art making and various visual art experiences.

In this thesis, I focus on the first art experiment project and a follow-up exhibition that the team set up and ran monthly from the beginning of 2011 to 2012. This particular project, titled “In between the two world”, was a collective photo challenge based in two locations – Hong Kong and Helsinki. The project had a total of twenty-eight project participants, twenty-two of whom were in Hong Kong, eleven of them male and eleven of them female, aged between eighteen and thirty. The first few project participants were friends of the project creators and were personally invited to the project based on their interest in the art experiment. The rest of the participants were openly recruited through the team’s social media platform and also included people that were invited on our behalf by those participants who were already participating in the project. Depending on participants’ own interests, they were to contribute as guest photographers in the art-making events or as project assistants responsible for project documentation during the events.

The nature of the project consisted of two layers: the art layer and the design layer. In the art layer, the team explored collaborative art-making with content about cultural differences between the two cities where the

two founders were residing; we then transferred our experience and dialogues into photography. In the design layer, the team went through a constructive design process to develop a flexible work model that was suitable for this grassroots project approach. Hence, with further exploration in building up an exhibition, I discovered a potential sequence for structuring a sustainable bottom-up creative community.

The two layers were situated parallel to each other, but also developed also depending on each other. I consider that both layers work together as one process, but under the scope of this thesis, the focus will be on the design layer. The art layer and its outcomes will not be analyzed in an artistic manner – rather, they play an important role in supporting research data collection and analysis.

THE DESIGN OF THE PROJECT FRAMEWORK

As mentioned, the photo challenge was held simultaneously in two cities – Hong Kong and Helsinki. There were two main project creators in the experiment, myself and my partner Tiffany Chan. We had multiple roles in this project, including: project creators, facilitators, and project participants. We were responsible for the art production in our location. In order to process this parallel project, I set up and shared with the team a basic working model, which had undergone numerous adjustments throughout the creative process of this grassroots art experiment. The working model used as a repeated monthly cycle was structured according to action research, a qualitative research approach that has been applied in both the field of design research (Avison, D, et al., 1999) and of artistic research (Jokela, 2008). It included four constructive steps (figure 4) that were planned to apply monthly in a one-year time frame. The four steps were: (1) Identify concepts; (2) Preparation; (3) Art Production; (4) Sharing and Reflecting.

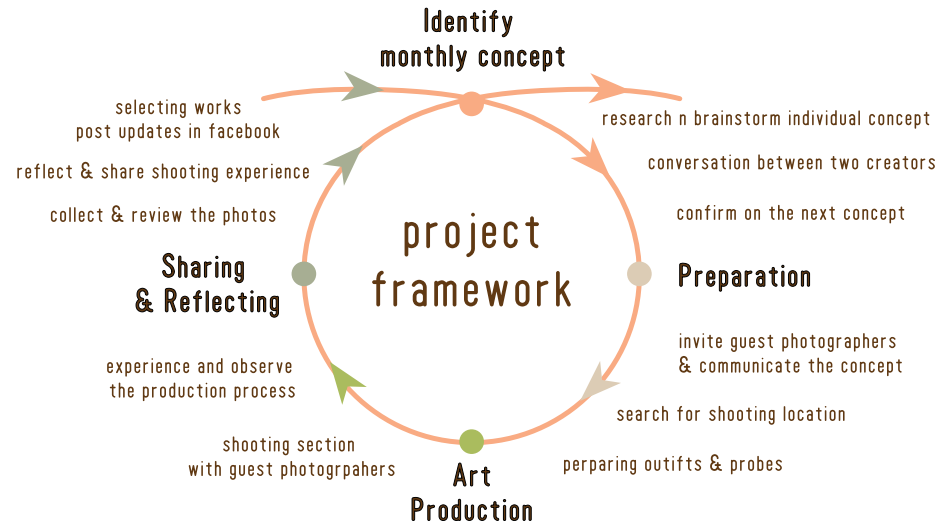


figure 4: Project Framework of Oranji Project

(1) Identify concepts

The cycle started with the first step, “Identify concepts”, which refers to deciding on a specific topic or theme for the monthly photo challenge. Each of the project creators first came up with their own ideas, then gathered and conducted research based on them. After the creators of the team prepared, there was an on-line meeting arranged for discussion and for sharing the materials. It often took the team a couple of discussions to confirm details, such as choice of theme and stories, shooting locations, use of styling and colors, etc.

(2) Preparation

In the preparation stage, each side of the team focused on the practical work that needed to be done before the photo-shoot. This started by inviting participants to join the shooting event and producing probes. Then the project creators communicated and discussed event details with project participants, such as refining concept details, project responsibilities, and arranging a schedule for the actual photo-shoot.

(3) Art production

The Art Production stage simply meant the actual photo-shoot day. It was usually a half-day event and lasted for a few hours depending on locational restrictions, weather conditions, and other factors. Participants who were invited to the session would be given responsibilities, such as being guest photographers or recorders and documenting the event using media of their own choice. The project creators often took the facilitating role, giving out rundowns and sorting tasks.

(4) Sharing and Reflecting

After the photo events were finished, all the photography works were be collected from the participants. There was usually a small sharing session in which the team could talk about their experience right after the photo-shoot ended. After that, the rest of the photo selection would be back to the project creators to handle and update with the rest of the participants through online platforms.

OBSERVATION ON THE PROJECT CYCLE

Following the design of the basic working model for this art project, the team started to organize and process the experiment accordingly. The project was carried out between February 2011 and January 2012. According to Avison, D, et al. (1999: 3) "In action research, the emphasis is more on what practitioners do than on what they say they do." Therefore, I applied my own observation based on my first-hand interaction with my project partner and participants. I gathered my reflections based on perception and divided the results into three stages: the early stage, the middle stage, and the final stage. Each stage included four cycles, meaning four months of the project. Details of the project cycle development (Figure 5) are presented below:

In the early stage, the team started out at a very small scale. Only a couple of amateur artists were involved. Since most team members were new to the concept of collective art, and generally lacked in artistic experience, during the first few months the process was carried out as a trial to review if the design of the working cycle was suitable for the goal. At the time, the numbers of participants were low and the project creators were responsible for facilitating most of the tasks and collaboration. The creative concepts mostly came from the creators themselves, as the participants had a rather casual attitude and had no intention of making a contribution to the content. Hence, due to the limited numbers of project members, interaction and communication were not active and were even hidden during the art-making events.

After a couple months of practice, the cycle itself was able to adopt some changes, such as different habits

and time management in each project team. As time went on, the numbers of participants had been growing positively. These rising numbers also appeared to bring in new perspectives to the project. Besides following the core concepts that the project creators came up with, the project participants also began proposing questions and suggestions around the same subject matter that was brought up by creating the artwork. The increased conversation between the project creators and participants, as well among the participants themselves, seemed to cumulate a more welcoming atmosphere for idea exchange during this stage. Moreover, the participants seemed to feel satisfied with being able to encounter with other amateur artists who shared similar passions and interests in creative activities.

When the project reached the final stage, the collaboration transitioned to become smooth and mature. The participants seemed to realize more value from their experience and accept the empowerment that the team tried to raise as the project developed. They became more direct in communication and less hesitant when they had to interpret and contribute to the art contents. During the final stage, some of the participants gladly shared part of the facilitating role of the project creators and the team worked together even more closely. There was a positive energy going around and it seems that most of the participants were satisfied with the produced artwork and enjoyed the experience that we had in this photo challenge.

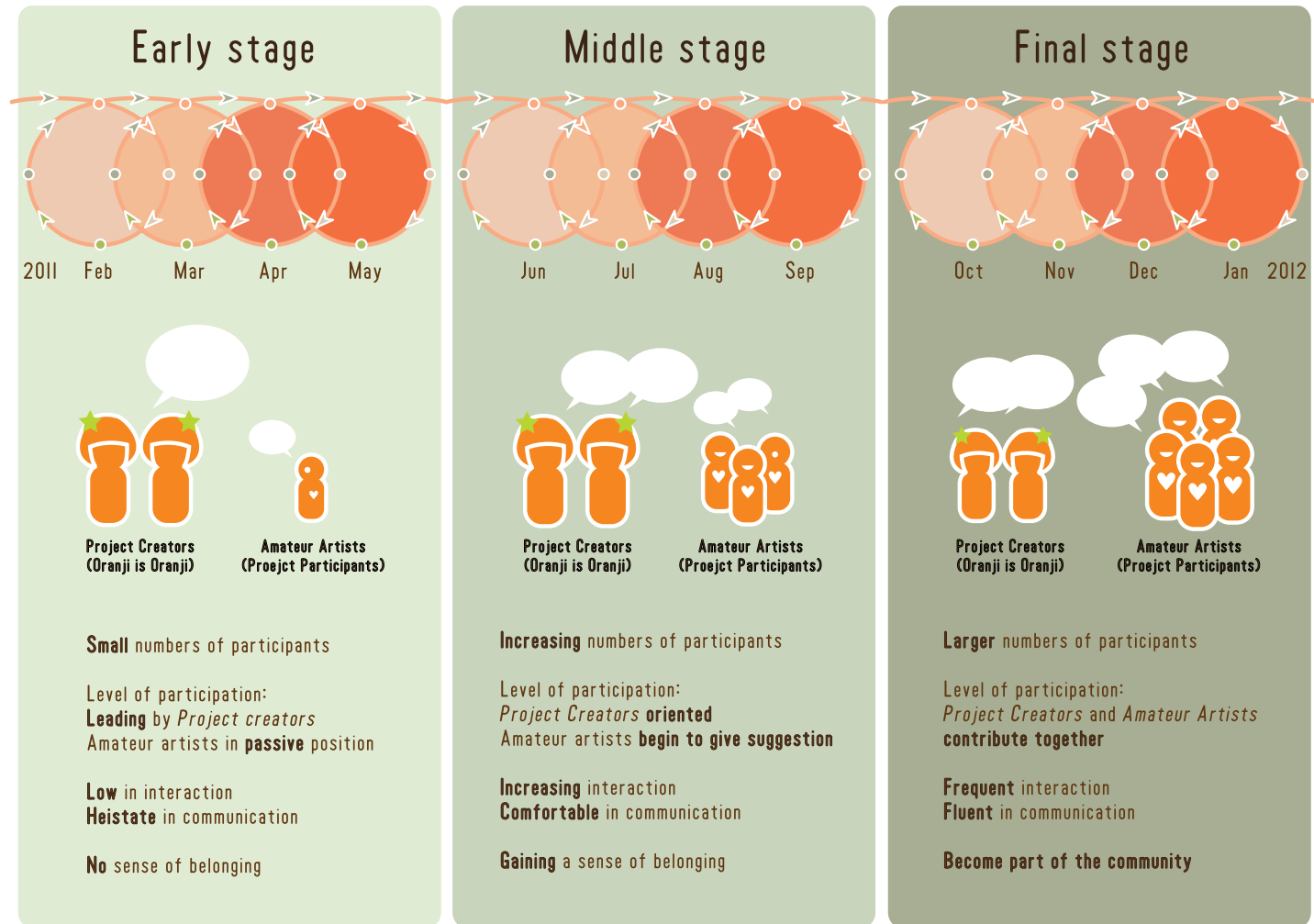


figure 5: Project Cycle Development

ART EXPERIENCE FROM PROJECT PARTICIPANTS' PERSPECTIVE

As mentioned previously in my research approach, I considered it to be essential to include the opinions of my project participants. Therefore, based on my experience in creating the project, I planned to revisit the produced artwork and project experience with my project partner and participants. (figure 6-8) Thirteen individual in-depth interviews were conducted during the research process with seven male and six female participants. In the interviews, I collected rich data and was able to understand their attitudes towards their creative needs, as well as review their experience of being part of the *Oranji photo project*, specifically the factors that transformed their attitude and emotional approach from before, during, and after.

Types of participants

After I analyzed my interviews, I categorized the participants into three types: *Project Creator*, *Passionate Participant*, and *Casual Participant*. All three types of participants had different profiles and needs. They also performed and located themselves with different roles and responsibilities in the project.

figure 6, 7, 8: Project participants in *Oranji* photo events



Project Creator

My project partner Tiffany Chan was one of the founding members of the *Oranji is Oranji* team. She had been responsible in the part of art production in Hong Kong. Her role had been very important in facilitating and influencing the project on many levels. Tiffany and I had a shared passion for visual art and had a strong belief in the value of creativity when put into practice. These reasons motivated us to team up and to then decide to produce an experiment together. Besides, as an illustrator and graphic designer herself, she also had an intention to challenge herself by exploring different creative elements that she was not familiar with in her profession. Through the collaboration with me and other participants, she believed that she could enlarge and diversify her creativity and gain inspiration for her other creative attempts.

Passionate participants

Passionate participants were the participants who were actively involved throughout the experiment. There were ten out of twenty-two who could be considered as *passionate participants* in the *Oranji project*, including seven male participants and three female participants. The interviews included five males and two females in this category. This group of participants usually had creative backgrounds or a personal interest in art and design and many of them had skills in multiple fields such as photography, crafting, drawing, and music. Some of them may also have been attempting to create their own artistic work. However, almost all of the *passionate participants* indicated in the interviews that it had been challenging for them to continue with their own creations. One *passionate participant* said “I was doing it (creative activity) as a hobby. Although I had been enjoying it, it is still hard for me to keep it up when I do not have any particular reason or motivation.” Another participant also mentioned “I do not have much friends share similar interest with me, I feel like I was the only person who had fun with it, but not anyone else.”

Casual participants

Casual participants are the type of participants who are generally hidden in the creative process. Twelve out of the twenty-two participants were categorized as *casual participants*, including four males and eight females. Two male and four female casual participants were interviewed for this study. Compared to *passionate participants*, the attitudes of *casual participants* were less active, but when there was interaction going on they still reacted to it positively. *Casual participants* may not have had many art-related skills or background, but they were always open-minded and interested in getting more involved. Most of them may not have had the intention to create their own work, but they enjoyed being part of the creative process once they were given the opportunity. However, their attitudes to taking on responsibilities were often passive and hesitant. Many of the *casual participants* explained in the interview that “I am afraid to take important roles, I don’t think I am skillful enough.”

EARLY STAGE

The general attitudes before and during the early stage of the project were rather passive. A couple of participants said that “I prefer not to expect too much when things are new to me, I do not like to make assumption to it, otherwise I may be disappointed.” However, several participants commented in a more positive way, such as: “I do not know what to expect, but i was hoping for an interesting experience.”

Although the project participants were feeling insecure to join the project, there were a couple of reasons that attracted and motivated them to take part in this art experiment and the reasons can be described under following four topics.

Engaging participants with contents and activities

Even though this research did not focus on the artistic outcome, the contents of the project were considered important among the participants. As they described in the interviews: “In the beginning, I was not sure what the experiment intent to do, but when I heard it was going to be a collective photo challenge, I thought it was an interesting activities I would like to participate.” Some guest photographer also said that they wanted to practice and improve their own skills through this opportunity.

Following the project cycle, the team had been sharing some selected works on the project’s social media platform and tired of keeping the project process updated. Some participants who joined the project in a later period commented that they were first attracted by the work from the monthly updates, as those mate-

rials gave them an idea about the experiment and also led them to become part of the project.

From the *project creators’* angle, it was also easier for us to communicate and convince people to take part in this creative collaboration when we had some physical evidence in hands. As Tiffany said in her interview,

To be honest, the real struggle was communicating and handling the activity itself. Especially in the beginning of the project when we tried to approach people with an experimental art activities. It is hard to explain what exactly we tried to explore, but with a monthly photo challenge it gave people a more concrete idea on what the project results may looks like, and that actually helped a little in engaging the participants.

Create opportunities and motivation

Both *passionate* and *casual participants* expressed that it had been difficult for them to look for creative opportunities on a day-to-day basis. They felt that the creative activities were always focused on the professional which was not open for them to access. However, they felt that the *Oranji project* seemed to give them a new option. One *passionate participant* said that: “In Asia, especially in Hong Kong, everything tend to be bound up with commercial value. It seems to me that the *Oranji project* was attempting to overcome this boundary and tried to create something in between.” He also added, “Normally I can experience an art event or exhibition as an audience, but with the *Oranji project*, I was offered a chance to contribute to an artwork. It was not a very common opportunity and to me it was excit-

ing.” While some casual participants also responded that

I had experience in attending some art and craft workshop before, but I never had chance to participate in an art project, I was always curious what would happen behind an artwork. I was very excited when I got invited to the project.

The feeling of being accompanied

It was because the experiment began with a concept of collective art, the *Oranji team* wanted to recruit voluntary participants based on their interest in the project contents or other creative intention. Although there was no high requirement for people to take part in the art-making process, still most of the participants were hesitant to take on responsibilities during the beginning of the project. This reason was frequently mentioned in the interviews and was reflected in one of the comments: “Although it (the project) feels like mission impossible at first, but because it was a collaboration, I thought that there was much potential in working with other participants, so why not give it a try.” Nevertheless, their worries seemed to fade away little by little when more amateur artists decided to take part in the project. For the casual participants, they also addressed their feelings about having company during the creative process, “I was happy that I had welcomed to the project even I might not able to make contribution to the actual art making process. I still glad that I could be someone to support this project.”

Creating under frustration

The average participants did not have a lot of experience in art making and creative collaboration. Therefore it was understandable that they did not have too much thought about the project before it started. Many participants felt frustrated when they first tried to interpret the subject of the photography work they were asked to create. A comment from one of them said, “It was not easy to tell if I was doing the right thing, I could only keep trying (to shoot more photos) and keep communicating with the *Oranji team*. If I was not sure, I had to ask.” Yet, another guest photographer added:

It was quite frustrated in the beginning, because there were no perfect answers or images for certain concepts or themes, it required time to think about it before I knew what to shoot, but you (the project creators) seemed to give me a lot of freedom to do anything, so it was not that bad.

MIDDLE STAGE

After all the participants got use to the project process, it was obvious that the collaboration between the project creators and the project participants started to become closer in the middle stage of the project. The creative atmosphere had a positive development and became more comfortable for the *Oranji team* as a whole.

Empowerment and struggle

Participants in this stage found themselves willing to contribute their opinions in the creative process more than before. There was more active communication between the project creators and the participants. The creative concepts that had been handled by the project creators slowly moved into the hands of the project participants.

These same reflections already appeared in my previous observation and were confirmed again by my project partner's experience:

I felt it became easier for everyone to collaborate after spending some time on the project together and developed our own way of working. As I worked with more and more participants, I had also tried different communication methods, such as storytelling and providing visual references. I always kept my eye on the participants' situations during the event. I tried to let them take the lead as much as I could. Of course, when I sensed that there was miscommunication or that they needed some inspiration, I would help and kept the communication going. I tried not to limit them too much though.

However, the interviews also showed that the participants struggled with the power they received. As they said: "Although I was happy to contribute to the creative process, I was not sure how much I should be involved in creating the actual artistic concept." When asking about the reason for this kind of struggle, most participants responded that they did not want to change the original idea from the project creators; they preferred their comments to be considered as suggestions and tried to stay some distance away from developing the core concept.

Beside the empowerment, time was another constraint that pushed the limitations of this project. As I mentioned in the framework design, the team gave the project one year of time and aimed to develop twelve different sets of works. The reason for these set-ups was to create a concrete and clear goal that could be shared with all the participants, and by doing so we could also avoid recklessness during the process. The team tried its best to go through with the art making process, but, as my project partner said in her interview:

It was a really stressful project because the time for each monthly production was extremely limited. It definitely put a lot of pressure on the creators' side and reflected on our own performance in the project. Thus, the participants who were collaborating with us were also affected by these pressures. I was always worried that it would bring negativity to the creative atmosphere. It was not easy to keep the balance in between.

Different roles and equal opportunities

As time passed, the project gained more participation and the creative environment also seemed to be improving. As one guest photographer said:

When I was shooting the photos, I tended to be very focused so I usually did not speak too much. However, I liked it when there were other participants (casual participants) who were not taking photos but were helping out in between. I enjoyed it a lot when they engaged in conversation with the team, and sometimes they also came up with small ideas that we could try out right on the spot. The atmosphere was casual and fun. At the times when everyone was working together, I felt great.

A similar idea also appeared in another interview with a *guest photographer* who participated in the *Oranji project* in the early stage. She said:

As we had a rather small team in the beginning, both of us (*project creator* and *guest photographer*) tended to concentrate on our own position. The interaction was there but it was much more passive and even hidden sometime. For me, it was a bit difficult to be active and productive at the same time. It would have been better if there were an assistant or someone who could help out in between, a role in which the person would not have been responsible for shooting, it would have been the best if they could also have helped suggest shooting ideas during the process.

These comments reflected that it was necessary to have different roles in the creative process because it helped to generate creative contents and to thus create a good team dynamic for the collaboration. Besides the collaboration between *project creators* and *guest photographers*, *casual participants* contributed as an “in-between” role to bridge the two, and from that together we built a better art-making experience.

Project stability and uniqueness

Another element that keep the participants from continue taking part in the project are the flexibility of the design framework. Although it was up to the participants whether they wanted to continue attending the monthly photo events, some participants who started in the early stage stayed with the project since then. This also explains why and how project interaction and quality of work began to gain a certain level of stability. Moreover, as mentioned before, each month there was a new theme or story set for the art event, so in that way the participants were able to achieve new challenges and discoveries from each experience. Furthermore, the project team had been reformed each month with the participants who were available for the event. It raised the difficulty of the project but it also added freshness to each experience. As one of the participants said “It’s like each time there was something new to expect. I got to explore different things and met different people. Even if the art-making process was the same, each experience was still unique and irreplaceable.”

FINAL STAGE

Reaching the last part of the project, the final stage carried on with the positive empowerment and the general attitude of the project participants was definitely transformed and became more positive and spontaneous.

Close interpersonal relationships

Within the one year time frame of the art making cycle, close interpersonal relationships were developed by the people involved in the *Oranji project*. In the interviews, many participants said they admired the dedicated attitude of the *Oranji team* and that it was one of the reasons they chose to continue participating in the collaboration. According to one comment from the participants:

I understand that *Oranji is Oranji* put a lot of consideration into designing the art events. They were very sincere in developing the collective artwork with us and I believe that this attitude provided the energy that linked all of us working together. Since there were quite a lot of us, when we were collaborating we also inspired each other. The atmosphere was supportive inside and outside the project.

A casual participant also noticed that: “Everyone in the *Oranji project* was very approachable, we were more like friends. I never felt like working, instead I considered all of us to be having an adventure together.” My project partner also agreed that: “The atmosphere became more relaxed and enjoyable when the team be-

came closer with each other. We always tried to combine having fun and producing work when we were hanging out for the photo-shoot.”

More satisfaction, more confidence

While listening to my participants, many of them expressed that they appreciated the collaboration with *Oranji is Oranji* and were satisfied with the results that we produced together. Participants also fulfilled their wish to practice and improve their artistic skills through the accumulated project experience.

The satisfaction thereby also seemed to raise their sense of confidence in creative work. They seemed to gain a lot more strength, and that appeared to ease their hesitation, especially when they were interpreting the project contents. One photographer said:

I used to only be interested in landscape photography and never thought that I would be able to produce portrait work, but the photo experiment gave me ‘an excuse’ to explore different topics and types of art making. Now I learned to enjoy more diversity in photography.

In addition, a couple of participants shared similar thoughts that the experience helped them to define the area they would like to explore in their future creative work.

Reflection and creating new meanings

The reflection of the project seemed to become more

important to the participants when the project moved closer to the end. In this stage, some participants related to their project experience from a more personal perspective, such as,

I think the *Oranji project* created an opportunity for me to re-realize something that I had not paid attention to in myself and my surroundings. I learned to appreciate much more detail in my daily life and in my creative work now.

Some of them also commented on the subject matter that the project brought up and related to. On the other hand, the experience seemed to lead to some reflection outside the project contents but towards the creator's identity, the meaning of artistic works and the creative environment. One of our *guest photographers* shared a challenging experience during one of the monthly photo-shoots:

I remember that time the team was shooting next to a luxury store; we were outside on the street, but right before we started shooting, the staff from the store came out to shout at us and forced us to leave. I was frustrated at first, because I really wanted to get a good photo there and we had no choice but to change the shooting location. However, the more I have thought about it, I actually feel that the situation was unacceptable. We were only a couple of normal citizens who took pictures in a public area like everyone else, so why would we be judged so negatively? This made me question many things, for instance, what is the attitude of the public towards the current creative scene? People

like us who try to do things differently, how should we position ourselves and stand for who we are? How to sustain a strong and positive attitude to continue creative work?

Following his strong emotional concern, he continued to give comments on the project:

Although it was a rather discouraging moment during my project experience, I still constantly question myself on the same issue even though the project is already finished for quite some time now. The event actually gives me a good reason to reflect on my thoughts as a creator as well as on the creative work I am currently producing, and this becomes a very unique result that I gained from this project.

CONCLUSION

The produced values from the art experience

By comparing my observations and the participants' feedback, I found that the general responses to the project experience were very similar. The design of the project was able to address some of the needs that the amateur artists were most concerned about. First, it provided encouragement and opportunities for both project creators and amateur artists to start creating. Second, although the project creators were in the leading position, everyone in the project had a chance to contribute. The team tried to even out the hierarchy by sharing the facilitation. Over time, the participants slowly accepted and manipulated the empowerment while the project grew simultaneously. Third, people involved in the project also developed a close and friendly relationship. They shared good memories and experiences and grew a sense of belonging and trust based on it. This collective project creates a positive and inspiring atmosphere for all the members in *Oranji team*. Fourth, the project enables a certain level of personal development, such as artistic skills and reflection of identity.

Finally, the flexible structure of the project made it possible to adopt instant changes and inputs as well as left room for each individual to explore different meanings through their own unique angle. Additionally, the participants also showed high interest in future activities from *Oranji is Oranji*. Almost all of them recapped their curiosity about how the project was going after the entire set of photo shoots was done. Some said they constantly checked back on the project's social media platform and looked forward to hearing news from the

team. On one hand, the feedback proves that the activities were well received by our audience and continued raising their interest and attention in creative happenings. On the other hand, it also inspired and encouraged the *Oranji team* to continue developing future activities

Constructive approach in designing bottom-up activities

One of the key results from this research was the exploration of the constructive design approach in bottom-up activities. Bottom-up activities usually start at a small scale because of limited resources, and a constructive design approach is useful to apply in this kind of situation. It was because the nature of this approach is very similar to Action Research (Avison, D, et al., 1999) The nature of this research approach is experimental and quick in responses, therefore it is effective for trying out ideas and collecting evidence before further investment.

In the case of the *Oranji project*, I was able to test the possibilities to hold a parallel collaboration across two cities that were located on the opposite sides of the world. Considering how challenging it is to operate in the current creative environment in Hong Kong, the project would not have been possible to put into practice if it had been started with a top-down approach. For instance, if I had tried to apply for funds from the bigger organizations with a fully planned project, it would not only have taken time to queue for funding, but it also could have limited the possibilities in such an experimental project if I had planned the details beforehand. Moreover, there was the fact that there was no exact assumption, measurement, or impact that

could be made before the actual experiment started. Not having any concrete experience and evidence in hand would have made it even harder to succeed in the application process for funding.

Likewise, the flexibilities of the project framework allowed room for adopting changes for instance in contents, time, spaces, ways of working, involved participants, and other practical elements that a bottom-up activity may face. These concerns directly affected the development of the project and were very essential in terms of project sustainability. The *Oranji project* had a relatively long art-making period, the repeated working cycle thereby continued adjusting in order to digest changes that appeared in different project stages. The ongoing development also had been stretched along the strength of the project framework and allowed for creativity to occur within the process.

In addition to the welcoming creative atmosphere that was frequently mentioned in the participants' interviews, the experience was highly dependent on participants' interpersonal relationships with other members in the project. In the collaboration, what participants wanted to contribute and how much they felt engaged with each other were all dependent on themselves. That being said, as the designer of this project, I had no control over what could have happened during the process. Instead I had provided a project framework that could be constantly updated with changes, which worked as a design solution to try to enable communication and keep track of the collaboration in-between.

SELECTION OF WORKS FROM “IN BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD”

Photo credits:

Oranji is Oranji

(Noel Lam & Tiffany Chan)

Guest Photographers:

Dee Tse

Ruby Lin

Tin Ng

Tuuli Utriainen

Victor Sin

Shelley Woo

























*Case study:
Exhibition stage*

PURPOSE OF CREATING AN EXHIBITION

Through creating contents together with different people, the *Oranji photo project* expanded in size and grew to become a shared art experience. It was not difficult to notice that the participants became more attached to the project and the people within the small *Oranji community*.

While the art-making process came to an end, there were many thoughts that had been growing around the artistic works, the *Oranji team*, and the loosely formed *Oranji community*. By experiencing the whole art project myself, I came to realize that the core value in this experimental project was - “communication”. It appeared not only as the concept when the project was first started, but it also carried on into the project development. It began with the artistic conversation and cultural exchange around the content, then continued with the approach of collaborative art-making with our project participants, and the ongoing interaction through art events and the social media platform throughout the project.

As mentioned previously, the art layer and the design layer in this project had been working closely together, influenced and developed also by each other. Even though the “communication” concept might not be strong enough to represent anything in the beginning, following the action research approach from the project framework, its value showed and became solid through time. In this case, the way that the *Oranji project* kept the communication going with the project participants turned into something as important as the artwork that was made. Hence, from a designer point-of-view, it went even beyond the artwork.

With our first project, my project partner Tiffany Chan and I both agreed on the subject matter that *Oranji is Oranji* brought up was the intention of communicating. We then started to craft our next experimental idea, that of publishing our work. It was of course a given to present all the works on the social media platform which the team had already used for interacting with our project participants. However, the communication there had still remained passive. In order to change this situation and to take the communication even further, the team began to realize that there was a need to construct a new art experience that could help to communicate to a bigger audience about our work. The idea of building an exhibition became more solid ever since.

According to the study of constructive design research (Koskinen et al., 2011), there is a research concept called “Showroom”, in which design researchers exhibit prototypes, photographs, videos, and other materials as a form of publishing their work. Because the approach has its root in Art, it allows researchers more freedom over theoretical writing and description. However, the exhibited materials were seen as design under the research framework rather than as an art piece. While for *Oranji is Oranji*, I borrowed this concept to construct an exhibition, on one hand it was a showcase of the results from the art experiment, on the other hand, the aim was rather to highlight the art experience behind the collective works and to try to enrich the communication through a more accomplished vision.

THE FIRST ATTEMPT

The first opportunity that the team encountered was a small supporting event that was held alongside a local music festival in Hong Kong. The festival arranged free spaces surrounding the concert venue and offered free tables for local creators to apply and present their work during the event day.

The team obtained this opportunity three days before the music festival was held. Because it was rather a sudden approach and at the time I was away from Hong Kong, I made my contribution by preparing the materials which were to be presented in the event, contracting with the organizer and recruiting volunteers who could offer remotely to help build this quick and small showcase. At the end, my project partner and four volunteers from previous art events agreed to assist in setting up the venue and helping to introduce the project to the event audience.

figure 9: Display set up during the event



During the five hour-long event, the team lay out a simple set-up (figure 9) and displayed twenty-four framed photos, which contained two photos to present each topic of the twelve month-long project. A laptop with a slideshow of additional photos was also placed for showcasing the art experiment. There was a sticker written with “pick me up” on the frame to invite the audience to touch the photos and read the short description in each photo. Information such as the social media platform and contacts were also provided on-site for the audience to follow the project if they were interested.

According to feedback from the *Oranji team*, most audience members were hesitant to touch the exhibited

materials. Yet, they started to feel more comfortable about holding the photo frames when the team started having a conversation with them. As reported by the team, most audience members seemed interested in learning the stories behind the work, and some of them even started asking questions about certain photos or details of the project. It was also reported that the *Oranji girls* were the most iconic element that caught the attention of our audience members. (figure 10-12)

Since it was the first time for *Oranji is Oranji* to present our work publicly, the team did not know what to expect before this opportunity came and went. The aims of showcasing the project had only been focused on communicating through the artwork. Although all the team members had been involved in the previous art making events, most of them were not familiar with communicating the project. However, they had enjoyed promoting the project as well as receiving feedback from the audience directly. With this first attempt, it helped the team to gain more strength to communicate and to learn to view the project from the angle of our visitors.



figure 10-12: Oranji Team interacting with audience during the event

THE EXHIBITION - “IN BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD” PHOTO COLLECTION

Following the first attempt, the team encountered a second opportunity during the summer 2012. Our first solo exhibition, *In between the two world photo collection*, was held in *Twodogs Backyard Studio* in Hong Kong from 15th July to 22nd July 2012. The exhibition was part of a newcomer art activities series “Twodogs Art Playground”, an independent creative activity launched by Hong Kong local artist Seeman Ho. Ho is an installation artist, her work has been focusing on promoting eco art and raising awareness of animal rights. Her studio *TwoDogs Backyard*, which she used to hold different art events and work for her own creation, was facing repossession by the property owner at the time and became part of the urban renewal progress later in the same year. The studio no longer existed at the time I was writing this thesis. Ho wanted to make the best out of the remaining time and decided to offer the place as a platform for young local creators to exhibit their work. The program did not have limitation on creative form; however, each proposal was reviewed by the artist herself, selected and approved based on originality, creativity, and quality of the work. During the three month event period, there were two painting and illustration exhibitions, two photography exhibitions, one theatre, two music shows, and several workshops related to health and green lifestyle.

Designing the exhibition

The team was given one month for preparation (figure 13) and one week for the actual exhibition. In order to deliver an exhibition within the limited time frame, the team shared tasks related to tangible artworks such as

photo selection and display making. We also divided the design tasks based on our own abilities. For instance, as Tiffany is a professional graphic designer, she took care of most of the visual tasks including all the photo editing and designing promotional materials such as exhibition posters, leaflets, and banners. I myself, on the other hand, focused on designing the venue experience, sourcing tools and materials, copywriting, liaising, and project management. Under the heavy workload, the team was grateful to receive support from our previous project participants. They helped us in some preparatory tasks as well as in promotional activities, such as spreading the exhibition information to friends and giving out leaflets and posters to places like schools, stores, shops, and other galleries. In addition, some of them also contributed ideas on planning the opening event and volunteered to help us set up the exhibition venue.



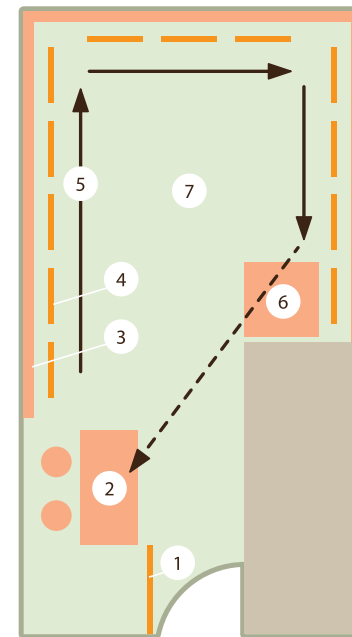
figure 13: Designing the exhibition

The exhibition setting

The subject matter that this exhibition tried to deal with was “to communicate”. On one hand I had to make sure that the artistic stories and themes communicated through the work, on the other hand I tried to utilize the work as an indicator to enrich the art experience as a whole. To reach this goal, I carefully broke down the design tasks into three aspects of the exhibition setting including: (1) **Visual communication**; (2) **Venue and Artwork presentation**; and (3) **Interaction with the audience**.



figure 14-15: TwoDogs Backyard



1. Exhibition Introduction
2. Greeting Area & Guest Book
3. Background Photos
4. Monthly Photos
5. Detour Route
6. Opening Event stage
7. Area for student workshop

figure 16: Exhibition floorplan

(1) Visual communication

Visual communication started from drafting the copywriting and promotional materials. The name of the exhibition had followed the original project name “**In between the two world**”. It also included a sub-title “**One Identity, Two Longitudes, Twelve Stories**”, which aimed to communicate the contents in the most minimalist way. Since the last showcase, I had noticed that audiences were attracted by the strong and colorful visual elements that the team developed in our work. I took advantage of that for communication, and the element was exaggerated further in the promotional materials as well as in the overall visual contents throughout the exhibition.

(2) Venue and Artwork presentation

The exhibition venue *Twodogs Backyard* was located in a small studio space in Central, Hong Kong. A location was at a short distance from the core commercial center, a little closer to other neighbor galleries but nearest to a local wet market down the street. It was an ordinary yet rather an old apartment and lay just in between our everyday lives.

When visitors stepped inside the venue, they would first see a short description on the wall about the project and the team. (figure 16) Next, there was a table where both of the project creators greeted the audience and gave out the exhibition leaflet and information. (figure 17) Inside the leaflet, there were stories about each artwork and a suggested visiting route with a floor plan.

The artworks were placed in a clockwise order according to the timeline of the project. There were twelve circle canvases that hung in front of the wall. Each canvas represented a monthly concept with two selected 8R size photos and a description of the theme and name of the photographer placed at the side of the work. Each of them also contained a multimedia collage backgrounds related to the contents. Also, there were around twenty smaller photos from each month placed around the canvas and interwoven into the whole studio surrounding.

(3) Interaction with audience

Interaction was one of the most important elements in this exhibition. Although this intention had been imprinted in the concept of the artwork, I tried to apply it also as part

of the visiting experience. During the exhibition period, the team presented at the venue every day to look after the exhibition and to interact with the visitors. We were also able to collaborate between two interactive events during the exhibition opening and a sharing section with our collaborator artist Seeman Ho and her art project students from a local secondary school in the middle of our exhibition week.



figure 17: Greeting Area

REFLECTION FROM THE EXHIBITION DESIGN

During the eight day exhibition, we met around four hundred visitors. They included our project participants, other amateur artists, young creators, students, and local citizens. After observing and interacting with the visitors on site, I again collaborated with series of interview questions targeted at the visitors' experience. During my MA thesis, twenty of the visitors were interviewed and the following account is based on these interviews. Thirteen of them were from project participants in the art-making stage interviews and additional seven were from visitors who did not participate in the art-making process. The seven visitors were all female, of ages between twenty and twenty-seven. They included two amateur artists whom I met from the same new-comer art activity from "Twodogs Art Playground", two young creators who had professional design-related backgrounds, two local university students who were participating in a hobby class in photography, and one local citizen who was brought to the exhibition by her friend. The following findings were categorized based on the Design application:

Visual impact and results

The visual elements that I planned for communicating the exhibition had been well received from most of the visitors. The exhibition poster (figure 18) had gathered good attention and had attracted many among the new audience. One of the visitors said in her interview that: "When I saw the poster with my friend, we knew that we had to visit this exhibition. The poster was fun, vivid, and full of interesting objects. We assumed that it (the exhibition) would bring us many surprises." It was

figure 18: Exhibition Poster



mentioned that the short subtitle had caused so much curiosity from our audiences that some of them said that they had gone online and learned more about the project before they came to visit the actual exhibition.

The setting of the venue seemed to give a strong impression among our audience. Visitors found that the venue fitted well with the concept of the team and our work. One of comments mentioned that “Even though the venue was quite small, it was very welcoming. Since your project had been emphasizing engaging people, I felt like the venue was more approachable when compared to the traditional art galleries.”

Moreover, many of our visitors had mentioned the colors Orange as one of the signature elements in the exhibition. This particular color was chosen for use as the main color theme for the exhibition interior. (Figure x) We used some orange color fabrics to cover the window area in the studio in order to create more room for displaying our work. Although it was started as an aesthetic consideration, it turned out to become a very memorable part of the show.

However, the overall visual impact also seemed to be overwhelming for some visitors, as they said “There were so many things to see in the exhibition, and all of them happen at once, it was exciting but also overwhelming and I found it hard to focus.”

The opening event

In the first day of the exhibition, the team held an opening event to publish the work to the public officially. The event was meant to be a small and cozy afternoon greeting and gathering for our guests and our previous

project participants. The team gave a short speech to introduce the concept of the exhibition and shared our intention to communicate and engage more audience through this exhibition. Our collaborating artist Seeman Ho was also invited to share her thoughts on the exhibition during the opening event. Yet, we underestimated the number of people who came to the event. (figure 18) The studio was so fully packed with people that we were not able to make conversation with every visitor and to listen to their comments directly. However, from the comments on our social media site and in the interviews, it seemed that most of them enjoyed the event and had left with a positive impression of the overall exhibition. Later, one of our project participants reported in the interview that:

I feel touched when I finally see the results from a whole year's work, and I thought the exhibition was able to showcase a complete vision of this project. From a small idea and built to become an exhibition, I respected the effort that had been spent on constructing this experience for us. I was proud to be a part of it.”

Another participant continued to add: “During the opening, I enjoyed watching people's reaction to the photos, and I was happy to reunite with other participants and to meet some new friends too.”



figure 19: Exhibition Opening



figure 20: Oranji team interacting and detouring with visitors

Detour and interaction

The route map which was included in the exhibition leaflet did not work for our audience in the beginning. A visitor commented that

I was not paying attention at first to the visiting route, however, I realized the changing of the project after I started to follow it with the stories, I noticed the development of the project from month to month and was able to understand the concept more clearly.

That being said, rather than waiting for the audience to discover the map, the team took a step further to enhance the visiting experience by combining the map with a detour. After that the exhibition ran fairly smooth during the rest of the week. However, I still tried not to influence the visitors too much when I first greeted them at the information table, yet, I usually approached them with casual conversation at the end of their visit. Depending on the visitors' responses, if they were interested in knowing more about the project or had questions about the work, I would listen to them and answered their questions. I would also put forth different open questions for collecting their opinions based on their interest in the project or in the design of the exhibition. (figure 20)

One interesting fact was that most visitors said that they had not expected to meet the project creators at the venue. As one of the visitors recapped her experience in her interview:

I was so glad to meet both of you! I never came across much experience to meet or interact with the creators. I was surprised and excited at the same time. It definitely made my visiting experience better because I was able to relate the work to a person and it was so interesting to know more about the happening behind the scenes. I felt even more attached to and respectful of the work.

Many visitors said that they enjoyed the visiting experience even more after hearing more about the stories behind the works. The detours we offered to the audience also provided new perspectives for our project participants to review the project. As one of our *guest photographers* said:

Before I came to visit, I was only interested in what kinds of photos had been selected for the show. But after experiencing the whole event, I realized I paid more attention to the concept and message that the work tried to explore or deliver. I thought it really changed my perspective by looking at a photo now.

The interaction that I had with the visitors seemed to inspire them to share their suggestions for the project and the exhibition. Since many of them were interested in the behind-the-scenes stories, they asked to have more contents on that and suggested creating them into video form. A couple of visitors also suggested that the team should collect all the stories and photos and publish the work as a book, and they considered that this way could help the team to communicate with

new types of audience in the future.

Student workshop

In the middle of our exhibition week, the team was invited by our collaborating artist Seeman Ho to co-host an afternoon meeting with a group of art students from a local secondary school. Ho is their art project mentor and would like to bring them to experience our exhibition. We were asked to give the student a detour to introduce our work. Ho then also sat down with the students and led a discussion arounds couple of our works and their visiting experience. She also invited us to join the conversation and we answered questions and exchanged ideas related to our own creative experience. (figure 21-22)



figure 21, 22: Student workshop with Seeman Ho

FINALIZE THE EXHIBITION EXPERIENCE

The overall experience in the *Oranji exhibition* had reached the purpose of enriching communication. Moreover, the interaction that the team tried to incorporate in the design show also appeared to have a positive effect on our audience. Not only did they share their opinions and gave out advice, some visitors also took an initiative to help promote the exhibition by sharing pictures and their visiting experience with their classmates, friends, and family. One of them said in the interview

The exhibition has a unique and energetic atmosphere that seems to only belong to *Oranji is Oranji*, I received encouragement and inspiration to create my own work, I hope more people can experience that from your work.

Similar to the end of the art-making stage, when the exhibition came to an end, we again received much interested feedback concerning the future work or plan of *Oranji is Oranji*. Many audience members were curious to know about the next project and some of them already asked to participate before they left the exhibition. And for those participants who had been involved in the previous project, they said they also looked forward to the next activity and expressed that they would like to continue to support the team.

While I was analyzing the on-site comments and interviews feedbacks, I realized that the overall responses were fairly similar in terms of visiting experience. The only, and obvious, difference was that the people who

participated in the art-making process had a much more personal attachment to the work and the people who were in the *Oranji community*. As the project was finally published as an exhibition, our project participants gained a lot of strength and confidence to maintain their current creative work and were often inspired to develop their future creation. Moreover, looking back at the time that I conducted my interview for the retroactive research, it had been around nine months after the exhibition. I noticed that a couple of our visitors had turned themselves into amateur artists. They had started exploring different subject or media for their own creative works; for instance, one visitor started a self-project called “一日一小花” (one flower per day), which is a photo album she created to capture flower photos daily. Another visitor who was interested in drawing decided to attend a drawing competition and she became one of the finalists and was in the process of completing her final work. Also, they had been constantly sharing their journey on our social media platform, and the team has been very happy to keep interacting and responding to their contents or answering questions that could help them in the creating process.

As a result, the whole *Oranji project* experience not only provided an artistic outcome but also inspired and activated the local creators and audiences to explore their interest in creative activities.

*A bottom-up
design proposal*

Rethinking the Oranji Project in a designerly way

The purpose of this research was to understand the needs and wants directly from the local creators' angle based on the current creative environment in Hong Kong. The study attempted to rediscover the elements in the case study that could possibly provide solutions to those requirements through a retroactive research process. Learning from the study and findings on the previous art experiment and exhibition, I recognized that design plays an important role in defining the functions of both experience. Especially the design of the collective art project shared certain similarities with service design. In this chapter, I am going to explain this finding with the following form of project blueprint.

Service blueprinting is a method that widely applies in developing new service innovation. It is said to be an effective solution for coordinating and managing service activities as a whole. This method emphasizes developing brand-new services, improving existing services, and facilitating cross-functional communication in support of customer-focused solutions. (Bitner, Ostrom & Morgan 2007).

At some point, this blueprint may sound contradictory to the concept of the constructive process I applied in designing of my project framework which I have presented in the previous chapters. However, the five project stages - Project Introduction, Sensitizing, Preparation, Collaborating and Creating, Sharing and Interacting - had resembled the same constructive cycle in the original design framework. Yet, the method

showcased the side of interaction between project participants and project creators during the art event and the project touch points in their creative journey.

As Bitner et al.(2007: 5) states, *service blueprinting* is “... a means of presenting the activities, relationships, and interdependencies of a service process in an objective and precise manner such that it is methodologically structured, but flexible enough to allow creativity to flow.” This concept actually shares the same intention of my design framework and matched my research results that a grassroots creative project would benefit from.

Although the *Oranji project* may have contained certain design elements in the project development, the working framework was, however, very fuzzy and difficult to elaborate even for the project creators themselves. One of the reasons for this was the lack of experience in starting a spontaneous project. Thus, the project contents were also very experimentative, so that the beginning of the project was full of frustration and uncertainty, which already reflected in the case study.

One of the important functions of *service blueprinting* is to help clarify the early stage of new service development, which is usually unclear and problematic because of imprecise processes and impromptu decision-making involved. (Bitner et al., 2007: 4-5) Therefore I tried to lay out the project details in the form of service blueprinting with an intention to review and improve the project.

The blueprint (figure 23) showed that there were some loose considerations that were intended to support the collaboration experience, such as samples of works

and reference materials. These elements were understood as physical touch points that were set up to assist project participants to get to know the project contents better. However, besides the photo contents, there was no formalization for how the project should develop and what it should reach for in different project stages. Not until the project creators themselves learned from their experience and spontaneously developed another way of creative collaboration –through empowering participants to take the lead in creation and guide them to produce their own creative value.

This blueprint also shows that the creators had very demanding roles in both the front and back stages of the project. This was because they were responsible both for creative tasks and for facilitating the project. This was also reflected in the case study, in that the project at some point was very intense for both the project creators and the participants. If this method had been applied when organizing the project, it would not only have helped to break down the tasks of the project creators, but it would have also balanced the level of participation. Thus, in that way, it would also have been possible to reduce the level of stress for all of the participants and to bring a better overall art experience.

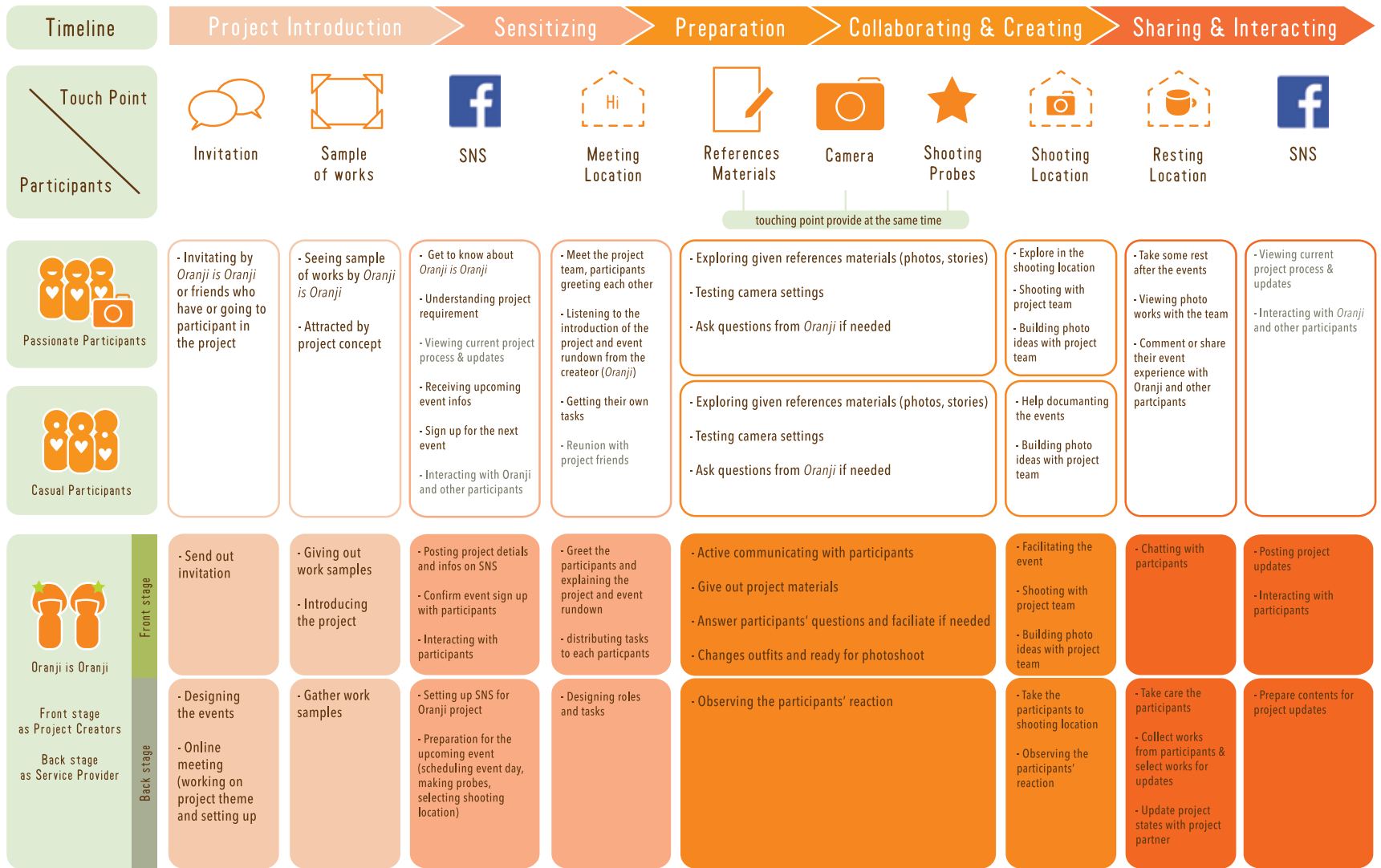


figure 23: Service Blueprint - Oranji project

ORANJI PROJECT AS A RELATIONAL SERVICE

Combining my retroactive research study and a more holistic view of my project process I gathered from the *project blueprint* also revealed that the art-making stage shared very similar characteristics to relational service, which is a service model that is deeply and profoundly based on the quality of interpersonal relations between and among participants (Cipolla, 2009). According to Cipolla (2009: 234-239) its three characteristics are:

- (1) Difficult to think about service scripts or guided service performance
- (2) Relational service is based on interpersonal relations between participants
- (3) Services that promote ways of living based on sharing and collaboration and reinforce the transition towards sustainability as they regenerate the local social fabric and promote the creation of new common goods

In the *Oranji project*, the three characteristics show that:

- (1) The *project participants* and the *project creators* were interwoven in processing the project, as all performance and results were highly dependent upon the involved members and could not be defined beforehand.
- (2) The project required relational capabilities, such as mutuality in responsibility, conviviality and trust, which most participants reflected in their experience in that they had close relationships with the other

members in the project and feel assured in working together. They also found a sense of belonging as part of the project team.

- (3) *Oranji project* was a grassroots art activity, inspired and created by local creators, and ultimately it aimed to promote a healthy and positive creative environment for local creators to sustain their own creation.

However, according to the Cipolla (2009: 242), relational service is different from ordinary service:

It relies heavily on participants, therefore it cannot be fully controlled by the designers; it can only be “meta-designed”, which means that designers can only develop solutions that enables participants to co-produce their own value and benefits, thus supporting them in doing what they want and intrinsically operating on the basis of the interpersonal relations they already have (or want to have).

As a result, these shared characteristics between relational services and *Oranji project* opened up the potential to develop a service that provided an art-making experience and opportunities for amateur artists and enabled them to continue building a positive environment for creative works.

Along the lines of relational service that Cipolla (2009) described, *Oranji project* can also be considered in the following way: “the people in relational service “produce” community, a common story, memories and identity.” This concept brings up the linkage between human encounters and community building. The same consequences began to appear in the middle of the art-making stage and continued to expand into the exhibition stage.

During the exhibition stage, the project encountered more types of stakeholders, including professional artist, young artists and creators, other art amateurs, students, and the general public. Through their interaction, there were different values delivered and exchanged through the project experience. To review the details, I created a *stakeholder map* to illustrate the collaborative mechanism in the project and the overall image of the current *Oranji community*.

Each stakeholder in this map (Figure 24) represented their unique contribution to the whole *Oranji experience*. The value exchange that occurred in these processes could be divided into four interactive groups, and each group indicated a transition of a project development sequence that built on top of each other. And from that, it provided insights for understanding the growth of the *Oranji community*.

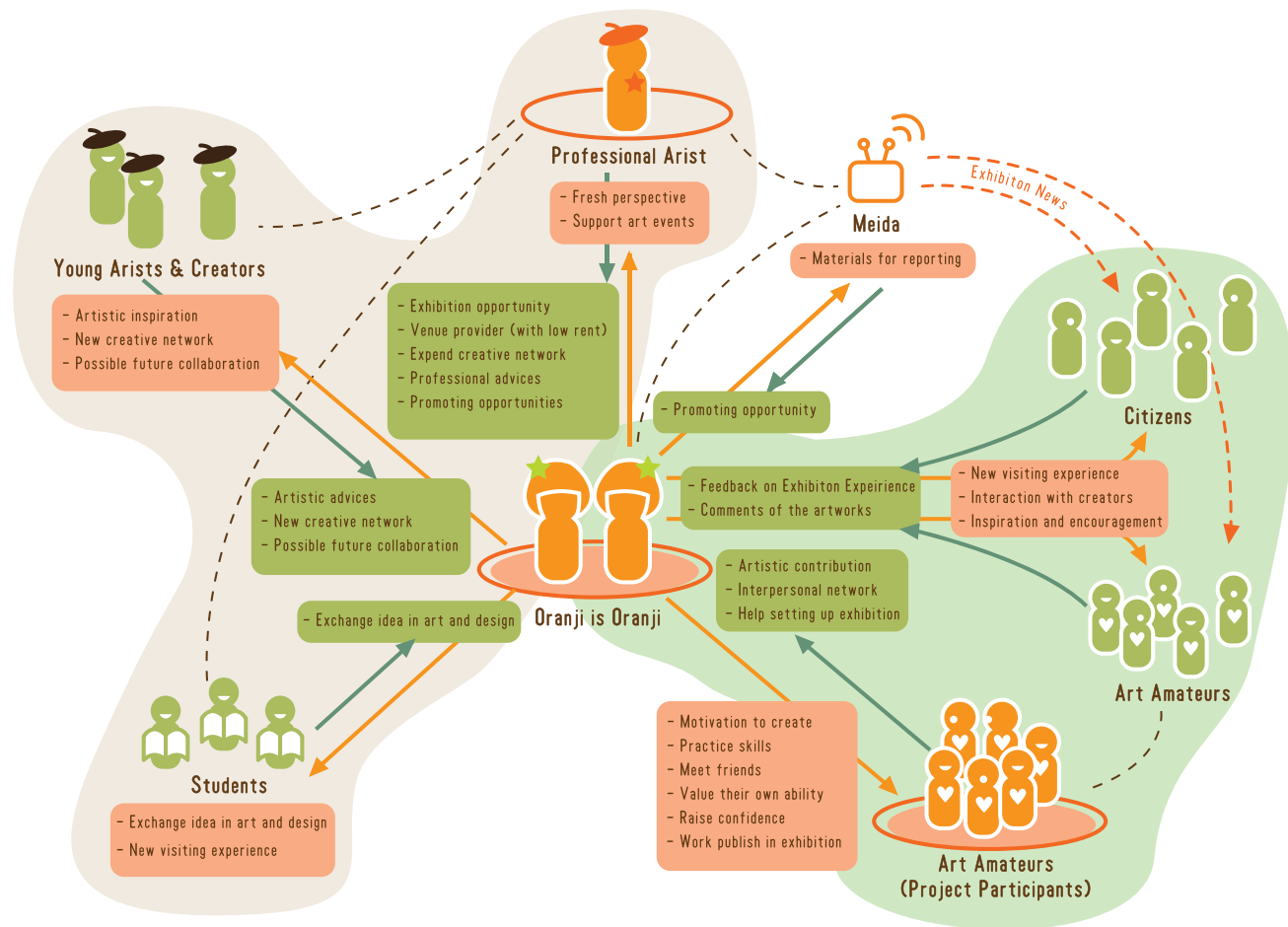


figure 24: Stakeholders map of Oranji community

The first group (in light orange circles) included project creators and project participants who were already interacting with each other in the art-making stage. They were the core actors in content creation and constructed creative opportunities for each other. Moreover, they were the people who shaped a basic grassroots art community based on the interpersonal network that existed through the creative collaboration.

The second group (in dark orange outline) was an extension of the first group. It involved all of the key actors that produced the actual exhibition. One of the most important actors in this group was the professional artist who offered the opportunity to the team to attend her art event series and supported the *Oranji team* in holding the exhibition. This particular chance provided the possibility for the small *Oranji community* to further communicate with a larger audience through their works. The professional artist also brought in additional media attention through her own network by reporting the art events she produced, and from that the *Oranji project* received extra help in promoting the exhibition.

The third group (in light green area) represented a group of people that the *Oranji team* encountered through attending the art event series. Some of the young artists and students we met had connections with the professional artist. For instance, we met several young local artists who were also art event series participants. We visited each other's exhibitions and shows and got to know about them and their work. Also, as I mentioned in the exhibition chapter, the team was invited to co-host a sharing section for the students whom the professional artist brought in during our exhibition week. This group also implied possible collaboration actors for future creative activities.

The fourth group (in light grey area) referred to the active members in the current *Oranji community* after the exhibition was held. They were the audience that visited and experienced the exhibition in person. They had face-to-face interactions with the project creators. Most of them had a high interest in participating future activities with *Oranji is Oranji*.

Recapped from the relational service concept by Cipolla (2009: 233), the most essential components by which the participants connect themselves as a community are their memories, stories, and identities that they create around their shared experience. Following the above description, the project once again showed the relational qualities of the interpersonal network among all of the involved members in the *Oranji community*. Consequently, the map also delivered concrete evidence for a grassroots creative community that was brought up through a constructive yet relational design approach.

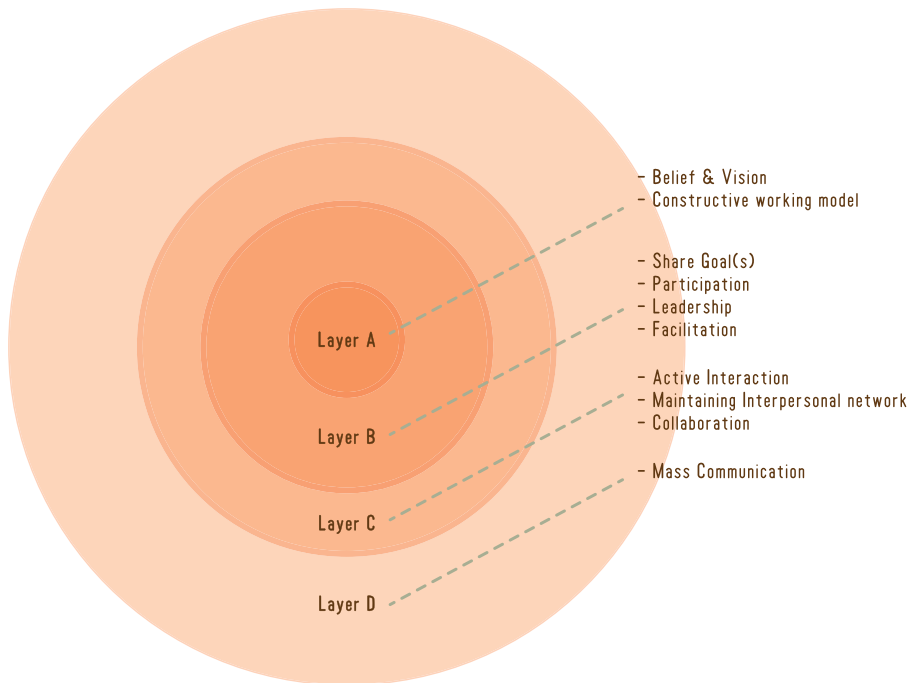


figure 25: “Four-layers” design framework

Community is not something that can be easily designed or prototyped, as it requires time to build, maintain, and claim its function on a social level. Although the Oranji project came from a spontaneous background, it has yet to gain enough strength to provide social changes as for now. However, what makes this community worth of study is its potential to become a sustainable solution for improving the local creative environment in Hong Kong. To embrace my study, I converted my previous design framework in Oranji project into a “Four-layers” design framework (figure 25), which aims to provide guidance for sustaining the current development and future activities in the Oranji community as well as acting as a reference material that could be helpful for establishing sustainability in other grassroots activities or existing communities from an organizational angle.

The layers in the design frameworks are: (1) **Foundation layer**, (2) **Management layer**, (3) **Interactive layer**, and (4) **Mass communication layer**.

The *foundation layer A* located in the center of the framework, can be seen as an internal preparation stage before implementing a grassroots idea.

(1) *Belief & Vision* represent the core value of a grassroots organization. This is the most essential idea that could define the objective, function, and identity of a community and its activities. It takes time to settle with a clear yet strong idea that is not easily shaken. Even though the concept may be very fuzzy in the beginning, it is possible to clarify it through the help of design methods such as project blueprinting.

(2) *Constructive working model* comes after *Belief & Vision* and serves as the first step to put the core value into realization. It provides a practical groundwork for the organization to build on their grassroots activities. Thus, the constructive nature of the working model allows flexibility for the organization to adopt and face new inputs, changes, and challenges.

The *management layer B* relates to practical set-ups that structure the running of grassroots activities.

(1) *Shared Goal(s)* is the proposed result of grassroots activities. It is valid during the activities period and aims to motivate the activities participants.

(2) *Participation* refers to the human encounters between the grassroots organization and the people who constantly attend to the activities. The numbers of participation give emphasis to the nature of the grassroots

activities as well as to the culture in the community.

(3) *Leadership* is required to keep an organization on track in order to meet the purpose of its activities. The leaders need to be perspicacious and reliable. They are responsible for clarifying the functions of the organization and for defining different roles and responsibilities. However, in a grassroots community, leaders are fairly close to the participants. Therefore, a leader with a humble attitude would help the organization maintain a good relationship with the participants. Good leadership also helps an organization to have stable development and to gain traction in the field.

(4) *Facilitation* is another requirement for maintaining the process of a grassroots activity. It usually applies to delivering tasks and serving as physical guidance that the participants can relate to and get information from. People who are responsible for the facilitating position need to have active communication and interaction with the participants. Gradually it helps to differentiate different profiles, habits, and needs of the participants and to develop the related activities design.

The *interactive layer C* is an external stage compared to the previous two layers, and it helps the organization to establish a social identity and start to gain attention from the related field and could be helpful in seeking for support and for opportunities to expand the scale of the community.

(1) *Active interaction* here means extending the interaction from internal to the external scale. The grassroots activities at this point carry the project progress to further communicate with people outside the organization. The result of interaction experience is a

way to examine the created activities and it will also act as a guide to reach another phase of development in both content and activities structure.

(2) *Maintaining the interpersonal network* is essential in sustaining an organization. As we understand from the previous research analysis, grassroots activities are mostly relational and highly rely on relationships between the participants. An active and positive interpersonal network will bring more enjoyment and opportunities for the grassroots community.

(3) *Collaboration* in this stage means interaction opportunities for exchanging ideas, resources, and support outside the original community. This kind of collaboration would affect and possibly benefit the level of implementation that an activity could otherwise not have if participants were working alone.

Mass communication layer D is the last layer I am going to mention at this point, and it is a layer in which a community can investigate its ability to communicate its beliefs and promote the grassroots activities to a much larger audience. Stakeholders who may be involved in this layer are: public media, social networks, academic organizations, etc.

ENVISIONING THE FUTURE

Regarding the sustainable design framework and my research on the current creative environment in Hong Kong, the *Oranji team* aimed to contribute to supporting the sustainable development of the current creative environment. To envision how the results of this study could unfold in the future, I created a future stakeholder map (Figure 28) that visualizes how *Oranji is Oranji* may be placed in the upcoming creative environment.

The foundation layer

Since *Oranji is Oranji* has been a relatively new and small creative team, the core activities were led by the two founders.

The management layer

During our previous activities, the team had collected some potential collaboration partners that may allow us to expand the diversity in creating new interactive projects. For instance, in the second layer, the orange color figures refer to the group of professional artists, young artists, art amateurs, students, and citizens with whom we have had connection since the last exhibition.

The interactive layer

This network could provide some great opportunities to generate a range of project ideas that could offer the community members' options to fulfill varying interests, needs, and skills that they are looking for. However, based on the concept of promoting a healthy creative environment, the *Oranji team* will not solely

be responsible for all the facilitation. Instead the responsibility would be distributed and shared with our future collaboration partners in the context of particular project needs.

Having said that, the way of work delivery and publication will also grow in diversity based on the future project content. The green figures which appear around the interactive layer represent the new groups of audiences that are indicated from those new projects and collaborations.

The mass communication layer

Followed by the growth of the audience, the blue figures which represent the new creative community also start to blossom around the interactive layer. These groups of creative community are generated from the project participants of *Oranji community* and the audience of the *Oranji project*. They are the people who get encouragement and inspiration from their creative experience with *Oranji* and pass on the idea of continued creating. That is the ideal circumstance that *Oranji is Oranji* would like to contribute to the local creative scene in Hong Kong.

Moreover, *Oranji is Oranji* as a grassroots organization also tries to explore the public means by creating discourse with the mainstream audience. The team did interviews with different offline and online media, and through introducing the exhibition (figure 26) and our collaborative art experience, we tried to promote art events with more people outside the creative field. We were also invited as guest speakers for an art event at a local primary school. (figure 27) I have represented the team by visiting the school and spending an afternoon

figure 26: Interview for local online radio



figure 27: local primary school visit

with 200 students. I shared stories from my own art and design journey and the experience in founding *Oranji is Oranji*. I also co-hosted an interactive game to create more communication access with the students. I understand that these activities were only the baby steps for mass communicating the bottom-up approach inside and outside the creative communities. However, these are also essential steps for local creators to survive and contribute to the change of the local creative environment.

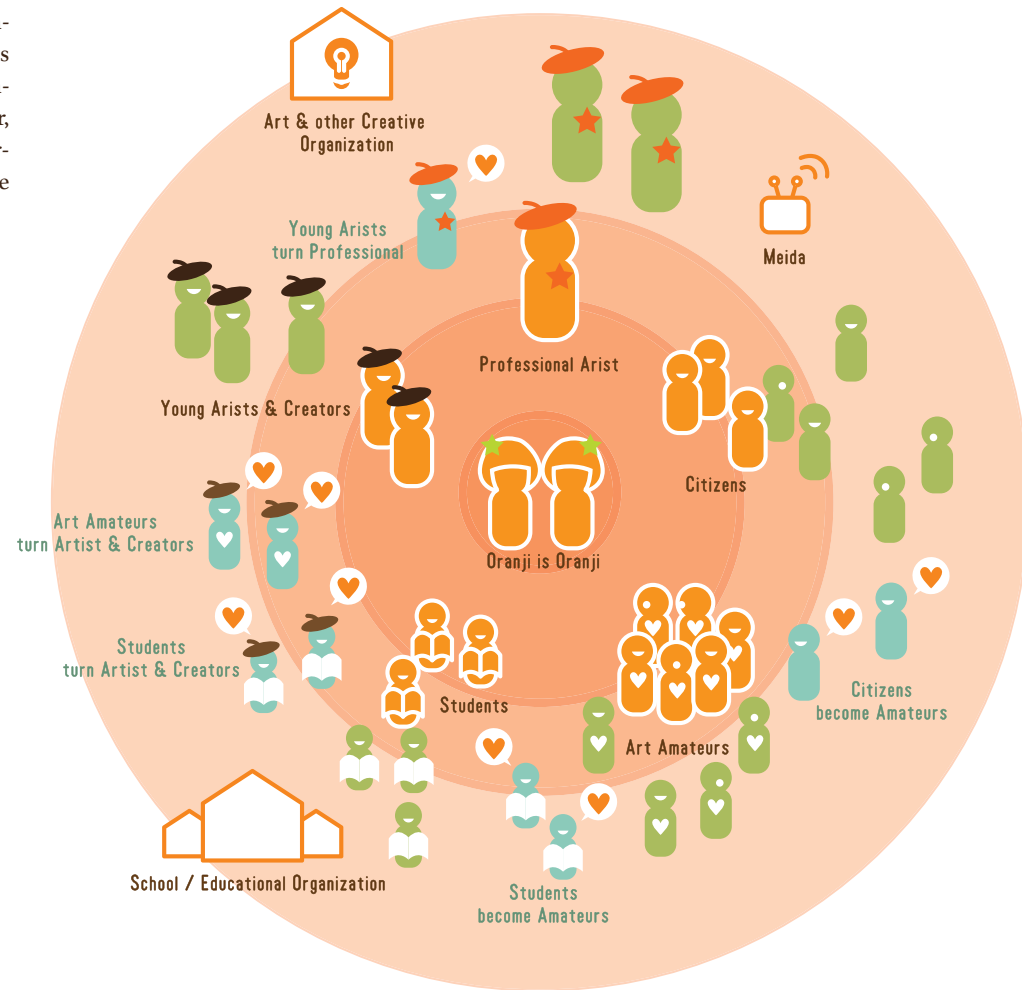


figure 28: Future map of Oranji community

CONCLUSION

This thesis work was inspired by my own collective art experience. It was a design research focused on the creative environment in Hong Kong. As my target group, I chose amateur artists who have always been underrepresented within the field. Through this thesis I aimed to understand their creative needs and to seek possible design solutions based on the local situation.

With a retrospective research approach, I utilized my art experience in *Oranji is Oranji* as a case study and reached a deeper understanding of my target group. Moreover, the constructive design research also helped me to rediscover the value of the design of my art events. The produced values led me to reimagine the structure of the project. As a result, I developed a service idea based on the art activities in *Oranji is Oranji*. The design of the service emphasized the autonomy of a grassroots creative community. It started by connecting and collaborating with other local creators and grassroots creative organizations. It has gradually increased creative opportunities in between the communities. However, the design proposal ultimately aims to change and improve the current situation into a better creative environment.

In addition, as I mentioned earlier in the background chapter, the biggest challenge of grassroots organizations is their ability to become sustainable. That said, in order to pass on the knowledge I gained from this thesis, I converted my project framework into several design guidelines for constructing sustainable grassroots activities and organizations. I believe this insight would benefit not only the creative field but also potentially provide support to other types of grassroots

activities in the future.

CHALLENGES IN THE ORANJI PROJECT

Communicating was one of the key elements throughout the *Oranji project*. However, already during the process, I had to admit that it was not easy to maintain good communication. Communication at its best can either maximize the results and benefits of the project or in the worst case hinder the entire activities. In the *Oranji* case, although there was a basic working framework for the team to follow, yet when we were implementing the art-making process, sometimes it still happened to be out of our hands.

For example, the time difference between Helsinki and Hong Kong was a problem for the project creators to discuss and make decisions about the monthly project planning. It was stressful because it did not always go smoothly during the process. Therefore, we had to struggle with the delayed schedule in preparation work, not to mention that both of the project creators had school or work alongside this experiment.

Moreover, as my project partner mentioned in her interview, it was also challenging to communicate an incomplete concept and try to convince people to join the collaboration. That was the main reason there was always frustration when our participants tried to work with us. Furthermore, since both of the project creators worked independently on our own side of the project until we were working closely for the exhibition, we noticed that we had a very different way of working and approaching concepts. It was hard to balance the leading and designing position because of the miscom-

munication, misunderstanding, and arguing. It was a tough phase for the team to adjust ourselves and to overcome the challenge together in order to complete our project goal. This experience caused me to look at the problems from a designer's angle. Therefore, I tried to apply the constructive design research to choose better solutions for communication as well as a better project structure for future development.

The *Oranji project*, in a way, proved that the bottom-up approach helped to activate people's interest in creative activities and motivated them to continue their own creation. In a larger scope, the project also implied that by promoting the bottom-up approach in local creative activities. Hong Kong has the possibility to achieve a more welcoming and sustainable creative environment.

CHALLENGES IN HONG KONG

However, due to the current conditions in Hong Kong, the bottom-up movement still needs plenty of support for processing and gathering long-term influence, such as allocating resources, recognition, and management training. As we understand from the background research, most of the resources are either in the hands of large associations or governmental organizations. These resources, however, mainly focus on funding the professional industry. Grassroots creative communities generally lack in the experience of searching for support or reaching resources. Therefore, in order to sustain the creative activities, many grassroots communities and individual artists choose to work with large associations and governmental organizations. Yet, this solution still has its constraints because most of these organizations have been using top-down approaches,

while grassroots creative communities have been facing the challenge of balancing between creative independence and their daily operation. Because of these reasons, the constructive design framework I proposed could work to assist the grassroots creative communities in establishing clear and strong core values. In that way, they could be prevented from vacillating from the intention of their creation and thus avoid becoming one of many market-oriented commodities.

Another reason to promote grassroots creative communities is to educate the mainstream audience. According to the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Fine Arts Associate Professor Kurt Chan (2011: 133), "The role of the arts to society is to fulfill social needs... At a higher level it should be critical, reflecting the idealistic preferences of the community and serve as a means for art education." Aside from allocating resources to the people in need and raising the quality of the industry, in my opinion, a healthy creative environment should also include the consideration towards the perception from the general public. Apart from good creative works and good creators, there should be audiences that are able to appreciate the creation. Especially for amateur artists and young artists, audience is one of the essential motivations for them to improve themselves. It also directly links to strengthen their ability to become sustainable for their own creative activities.

I have to emphasize that the bottom-up approach and the constructive design proposal are not aimed at advocating the expansion of individual grassroots communities. Rather, the solutions want to focus on creative independence and sustainability. The bottom-up approach, in my opinion, appears to counterbalance the mainstream top-down approach. With the help

of the constructive design framework, more and more grassroots communities will grow from different creative backgrounds. Thereby, they could become a powerful support for the creative field and achieve positive changes in a true bottom-up movement.

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

The research result from this thesis is a design framework that aims to provide guidance on establishing sustainability in grassroots activities or in an existing bottom-up community. I had envisioned the future application based on the Hong Kong context. The proposal, however, also had opportunities to be utilized in Western contexts. For instance, part of the *Oranji project* was conducted in Helsinki, so that the same design thinking had already applied into the art-making process in a Western context. It would be really interesting to continue the study and examine the design proposal and to also understand the voices from the creative communities on the opposite side of the world.

As this study had been walking between the field of art and design, it also extended certain diversity in the study areas, such as exploring the application of creative collaboration in art education and understanding the roles of community arts in non-formal art education and their effects on the citizens and society. It is also possible to continue to examine different design methods and proposals that could enhance the construction and communication in not only the creative field but also in the grassroots community. Personally, I am most interested in working with people. Therefore, I would love to further develop knowledge in art and design and support the bottom-up movement by continuing to build new experiences and ideas which are

engaging and valuable for participants of different ages and backgrounds.

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